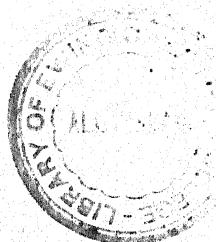
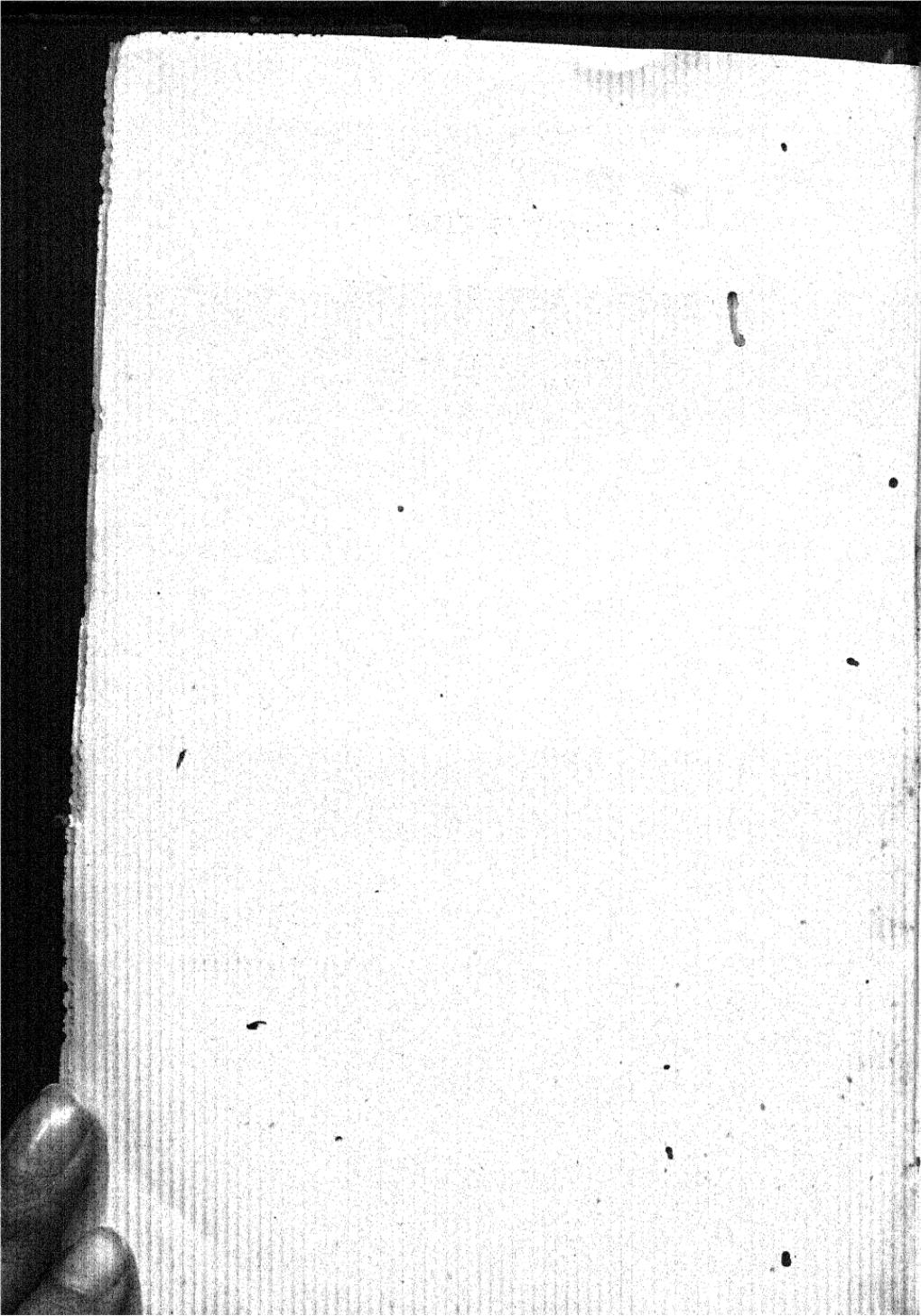


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AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
HISTORY AND MESSAGE
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT





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to the
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of the
NEW TESTAMENT

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*Published in India under the
joint auspices of the*

YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT
OF INDIA, BURMA AND CEYLON



Y.M.C.A. PUBLISHING HOUSE
5 RUSSELL STREET, CALCUTTA

1947

*First published 1944
Reprinted 1947*

PRINTED IN INDIA BY S. N. GUHA RAY, B.A.
AT SREE SARASWATI PRESS LTD., 32 UPPER CIRCULAR ROAD.
CALCUTTA



PREFACE

THE generous reception given to 'An Introduction to the History and Message of the Old Testament' published in 1943 has encouraged me to prepare for the Press a parallel introduction to the New Testament, which consists, like the former book, of lectures originally prepared for a Y.W.C.A. and Y.M.C.A. summer school at Ootacamund in 1940, and an apology is due to the members of that school for the long interval of four years between the delivery and publication of the lectures. The purpose also is similar,—to provide for those who have no opportunity of taking a full course in Biblical studies, an introduction that will help them in their reading, study and teaching of the New Testament ; and the aim will not have been fulfilled unless the book sends the reader back with quickened interest to the text of the Bible and to the many excellent commentaries on the several books of the Bible that have been published especially in recent years.

The arrangement of the earlier chapters needs a word of explanation, since the order followed is neither that of the books of the New Testament beginning with Matthew, nor the chronological order in which they were written, beginning with the letters of Paul. The theme of the New Testament is God's new Covenant with man in Jesus Christ, and so after an introductory chapter dealing with the New Testament as a whole, we first ask what the earliest disciples of Jesus thought and taught about Him, as seen in the book of Acts. Then comes the picture of Jesus as presented by the earliest of our Gospels, Mark, followed by the re-interpretation of His life and teaching in the Fourth Gospel.

Since the attempt was made to cover the whole New Testament in eight lectures a selective process had to be followed, and in each case an introduction to a book or series of books is given, and then a closer study of some typical verses of chapters to bring out the central message of the writer. Special attention is directed to the suggested readings at the beginning of each chapter, and to the brief bibliography on page 74.

My indebtedness to many New Testament scholars will be obvious to readers of recent books on the subject, but special acknowledgement is due to Dr. C. H. Dodd and to the late Canon Streeter. Finally, I should like to thank once again the members of the Ootacamund Summer School for the encouragement and inspiration received by the author through the interest they showed in the lectures, and to the publishers for help given, suggestions made, and readiness to undertake the publication in spite of the difficulties of the present time.

Carey House,
Chandernagore,
1944

G. H. C. A.

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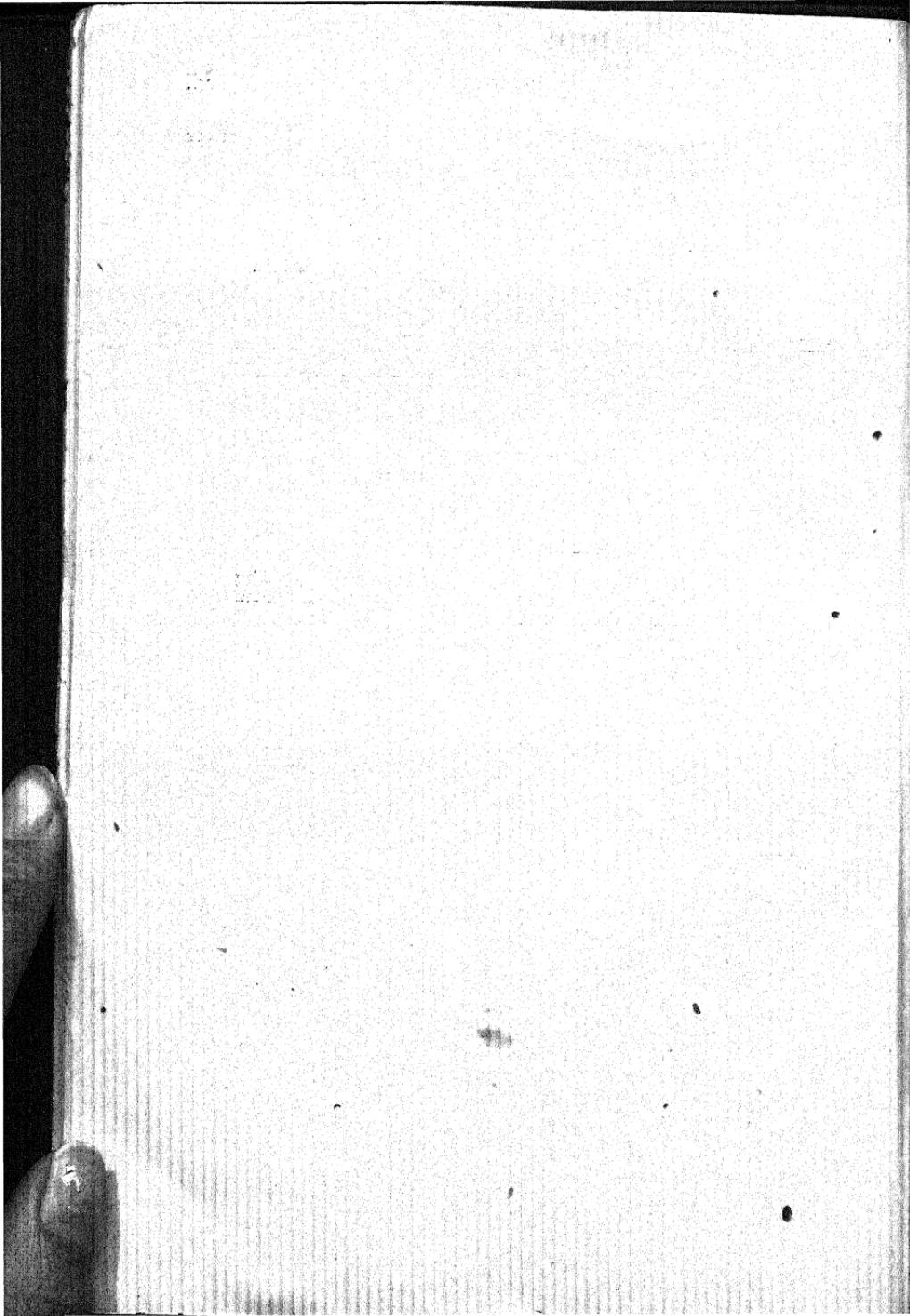
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CHAPTER I

THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST

The Bible is a written record of how God in His infinite love for the children of men entered into covenant relationship with them in order to redeem them from sin and lead them into intimate fellowship with Himself. The Old Testament has as its dominant theme the Law which was given by God through Moses when God formed the Covenant with the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament the place of the Law is taken by Jesus Christ Himself through Whom God made a new Covenant which was to be available for all mankind. But so fundamental to both parts of the Scriptures is the idea of the 'Covenant' that it found its way into the title of each section ; and whenever we speak of the New 'Testament' we do well to remember that it is nothing less than the record of God's Covenant with us in Christ. Today in the Christian Church we take the New Testament—perhaps too readily—for granted. Thanks largely to the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society we may read it in 750 of the languages of the world. Whether we go into a Roman, an Eastern or a Protestant Church we shall find the same New Testament in use. But it was not always so; it did not come ready made for the guidance and inspiration of the Christian Church. And so, before proceeding to the history and message of the several parts of the New Testament, we begin with a rapid survey of the whole, taking into consideration how it was that it ever came to be written, and how the text has been preserved for us through the ages.

i. 'Scripture' in the Early Church.

When the Christian Church first came into being, say at Pentecost, it consisted of Jews who differed from the rest of their fellow-countrymen and fellow-religionists in one point only, vital though it was ; namely, that Jesus of Nazareth was not a rightly crucified perverter of the faith of Judaism,

but was the promised 'Messiah' or 'Christ', sent by God in accordance with the promises recorded in the Old Testament to redeem His people. He had accordingly been raised by God from the dead and was exalted to His right hand, whence He would come again in glory to judge the world. The hope of the disciples of Christ was that soon the whole nation would recognize the mistake of their rulers and acknowledge Him to be the Lord. Hence the aim of their early preaching was to prove from the Old Testament that 'Jesus is the Christ'. The Old Testament writings were their Scriptures, and they would at first never have thought of any other scriptures to take the place of these holy books. Our Lord had known them thoroughly, had nourished His own spiritual life upon them, had used them constantly as the basis of His teaching, and had by His re-interpretation of them endeavoured to open the Scriptures to the minds of His hearers. His disciples followed His example, and there is evidence to suggest that a collection of passages from the Old Testament was compiled to assist preachers and evangelists in their work of convincing the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. Similarly, in worship when they met apart, as in the synagogue so here in the Christian gathering, the Law and the Prophets were read and expounded as God's word to man. The Old Testament scriptures were their Bible.

2. *The need for new written records.*

With the passing of the years however new needs were gradually recognized. At first the Early Church lived in the daily expectation of the coming of the Lord to establish His Kingdom on earth. Moreover, the community was at first confined in the main to Judaea and Galilee, and the large majority had either seen or heard Jesus personally, or at least had heard from eye-witnesses accounts of how He had gone about doing good. But by degrees some of the older Christians began to pass away,—we know from Paul's letters to the Thessalonians how much this troubled some of the disciples,—and still the Lord's coming was delayed. The number of those disciples who had personally accompanied with our Lord grew fewer, while Christian enquirers from more distant places began to ask for some more information about the life and teaching of Jesus. So it came about that one and

another began to write down notes of the main incidents in His Ministry, and some years later Luke in the introductory paragraph to his Gospel could refer to the many who 'have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us'.

(a) *Paul's Epistles*.—About the middle of the first century Paul started on his widely-extended missionary travels and as he went from place to place he adopted the method of letter-writing for keeping in touch with his converts, and for giving them definite guidance and instruction in matters of faith and morals. Of course these letters were not 'scripture' but they were very precious and helpful letters from a friend and spiritual teacher. They were no doubt read at gatherings of Christians for worship in the house of one of the Elders, but they were read as a message from man to man like the exposition of the Scripture, rather than as the word of God to man as Scripture itself was regarded. All the same the intrinsic value of the writings was such that neighbouring Churches would certainly be glad to hear them read, and then would borrow them and make a copy of them to keep. Thus a collection, or different collections, of Paul's letters would be treasured in the various Churches.

(b) *The Gospels*.—When the original Apostles were passing away, some by natural death, others by martyrdom, and still the Lord's Advent was delayed, the need for authentic records of His Ministry was more strongly felt. By this time many incidents and sayings of our Lord had reached a stereotyped form through their constant usage in preaching and teaching, and now the moment had arrived when they should be committed to writing. It is probable that shortly after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome, Mark wrote, in about A.D. 64, our second Gospel practically as we have it today, putting down though 'not in order' as tradition tells us, what he could remember of the things that Peter used to say in his preaching and teaching. This book was widely circulated, and a few years later was largely incorporated by Luke when he wrote in Greece his Gospel for Theophilus, and by another anonymous editor who made use also of an early Aramaic work of Matthew, through which the Apostle's name was given to our first Gospel.

(c) *Other writings*.—The anonymous letter to the Hebrews was written a little before or after A.D. 70, while the litera-

ture that is contained under the name of John comes from about the end of the first century. The dates of the Epistles of James and of Jude are uncertain ; I Peter must presumably have been written by A.D. 60, while II Peter should most likely be assigned to the middle of the second century by someone other than the Apostle.

All these writings were then composed by men writing to men, Churches, groups or individuals, at a definite place, to meet a definite and local need, and in the current Greek of the day. Neither author nor recipients thought of the documents as 'Scripture'. How and when did the change take place?

3. *The Formation of the Canon.*

When the change came about it is really impossible to say : it all took place so gradually, so silently, so naturally, almost inevitably. We can however trace some of the steps in the process. It was the rise and growth of certain heretical ideas in the Christian Church that seems to have been mainly responsible for the recognition of an authoritative body of Christian literature, a 'Canon' of Scripture. Actually the earliest list of authoritative books of which we have any knowledge was one made by a great Christian holding certain heretical ideas, Marcion, in about A.D. 154. His canon consisted of an 'improved' edition of the Gospel of Luke, made to conform to Marcion's own views, and ten letters of Paul including one 'to the Laodiceans', which is generally agreed to be our letter to the Ephesians, but excluding the letters to Timothy and Titus. But lists of this kind are rare, and until late in the second century we are dependent upon quotations from Church Fathers for forming an opinion of the esteem in which different books were held ; it is not surprising to find that one part of the Christian Church did not always attribute the same value to a book as another part. Certain notable facts, however, stand out.

With regard to the Gospels, quotations from our four begin from early in the second century, while very rarely is a quotation found from any other gospel though we know that several existed. In about A.D. 175 our four Gospels had attained such security and pre-eminence that when Tatian wrote his account of the Ministry of Jesus in the words of

scripture it was our four Gospels that he harmonized for the purpose, and the work was called the *Diatessaron*, 'By means of four. At about the same time Irenaeus spoke of the Gospels as four pillars of the Church, and regarded the number as natural and necessary as the four winds or the four corners of the earth. Further, from the earliest times there seems to have been not the slightest hesitation with regard to twenty out of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, namely, the four Gospels, Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, I Peter and I John. The remaining seven books had more of a fight to obtain recognition. Towards the end of the second century the need arose of having the Christian writings translated into other languages. Hitherto Greek which was so widely spoken throughout the Empire had met all requirements, but as the Gospel was preached to the more outlying districts a translation was demanded first in Syriac and Latin, later in Egyptian. As compared with our present New Testament the 'Old Syriac' version lacked II Peter, Jude, II and III John and the Revelation: the 'Old Latin' version omitted II Peter, James and Hebrews.

Origen (185-255) the head of the great Theological School at Alexandria, and later at Caesarea, a wide traveller and great student and expositor of the scriptures, divided the books into those universally admitted, and those that were disputed. Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 260-340), the Church Historian, speaks of books 'acknowledged', 'disputed', 'spurious', and 'heretical'. The chief fight throughout this period raged over the admission of Hebrews and Revelation into the Canon. The Eastern Church, believing Paul to have written Hebrews in Rome, readily included it, but rejected Revelation. The Western Church, knowing that Paul was not the author of Hebrews, was hesitant in acknowledging an anonymous work, while they welcomed Revelation in the belief that the Apostle John had written it. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in a Pastoral letter for Easter A.D. 367, is the first Church leader to give the exact twenty-seven books of the New Testament as we have them. Even Augustine in A.D. 400 is still speaking of grades, according to the number or influence of the Churches that accepted certain books, but it was mainly due to his authority and the influence of his contemporary Jerome that the Western Church, followed in this matter later by the Eastern Church,

finally accepted our twenty-seven books. We do not know for certain of any widely representative Church Council having authorized a canonical list of books until the Roman Catholic Council of Trent as late as the year 1546, when a rider was added that the Vulgate, or Latin translation made by Jerome, was to be regarded as the authentic text.

Out of this very brief survey two points are worth further emphasis. First, there is the fact just referred to, that in spite of the lack of any official pronouncement the Church as a whole was led to the unanimous conclusion on this vital matter of scripture. One might have thought that consideration of an authoritative list of Christian writings would have been one of the first things to occupy the attention of an oecumenical council: but it was not so. After the first dangerous days of persecution were over it was rather to theological belief that the Church leaders devoted their attention. Consequently each community of Christians collected such books as seemed most profitable and were available to them, and when unanimity was reached it was truly the result of the united opinion of the whole Church. Could there be clearer evidence than this of the guidance of the Holy Spirit of God?

The second point is this, that if we wish to test for ourselves the excellence of the choice made, we fortunately have the material available in the large remnants of early Christian literature that have come down to us. There were some books that were very nearly included in the canon, such as the Epistle of Barnabas, often compared unfavourably with the Epistle to the Hebrews. This along with the 'Shepherd of Hermas' is to be found following upon the books of the New Testament in *Codex Sinaiticus*, one of our earliest and best manuscripts of the whole Bible. Some books were regarded as good for reading, but not to be used for dogmatic purposes, such as the *Didache or Teaching of the Twelve*, dealing with Christian worship and kindred matters. Others again were definitely rejected as apocryphal. Many fragments are extant from early Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Revelations, some no doubt containing early and accurate traditions, others little better than legends; but nearly all of them full of interest, and serving to set off in a wonderful degree the striking sobriety, dignified narrative, and self-evidencing truth of our New Testament books, pre-eminently the Gospels.

Thus, our New Testament was written and selected in a remarkably ordinary, human way,—and all overruled and controlled by the unseen Spirit of God.

4. *The Preservation of the Text.*

Hitherto we have been dealing with matters that belong to what is technically known as 'Higher Criticism', which is nothing more terrifying than an investigation into the origin of a book, and the attempt to find out just when, in what circumstances and by whom a book was written. We now pass on briefly to 'Lower' or 'Textual Criticism', which is an investigation into the actual text that we read, its accuracy and its preservation through the years. Even though we know that all our New Testament books were written by about A.D. 120, and have from the beginning been in the main accepted by the Church, can we be sure that we today have the true text before us? If, for example, a sincere Mohammedan comes to us and charges us with having a corrupted text, have we any answer to give him? Why is it that we sometimes find a different translation in the English Revised Version as compared with the Authorised Version? or even that some verses are found in one that are not in the other? These questions again introduce us to a subject as vast as it is fascinating, of which we can but touch the fringe. But we do so in the hope that it may lead to further study, and in the conviction that the further one goes with the enquiry the more confident one becomes of the essential excellence and security of our text.

The first printed edition of the Greek New Testament was completed on January 10th, 1514; but the first edition that was presented to the world was the one published by Erasmus in 1516. Up to that time every copy, of course, had to be made by the hand of a scribe. In the earliest days it was rare to find all the New Testament written together in one volume. Up to about A.D. 300 so long as papyrus* rolls were in use a single book of the length of one of the Gospels would fill a whole papyrus roll. Even before papyrus gave

* Papyrus was a reed-plant that grew profusely near the Nile. Strips of it were glued together, some horizontally, some vertically, and used as 'paper' for writing.

place to parchment, however, leaf-books came to be introduced, and it was then customary to have 'The Gospel' (containing the four Gospels) in one volume, 'The Apostle' (or the letters of Paul) in another, and the rest of the New Testament in a third. Occasionally all the New Testament, or even the whole Greek Bible would be bound up together, as in our greatest manuscripts, the *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*, written in Egypt in the fourth century. How far, then, can we be confident of the accuracy of the scribes in this vast work of copying the Scriptures?

We have at least two safeguards ; in the mass of material that has come down to us, and in the minute investigation that foremost scholars have made especially in the last one hundred years. Two comparisons with ancient classical authors will help to show the strength of our position as to the material available. The total number of Greek manuscripts of all or part of the New Testament is said to be over 3,800 ; for the works of the great Athenian dramatist, Sophocles who lived in the fifth century B.C., we are dependent on one single manuscript of the eighth or ninth century A.D., some 1300 years later than Sophocles lived. Again, whereas the oldest complete manuscript of 'Homer' belongs to the thirteenth century A.D. (some two thousand years later than the original composition), our earliest Greek manuscripts go back to the fourth century ; behind them we have later copies of the versions in Syriac and Latin which were translated before the close of the second century ; and behind them again we have a growing number of papyri fragments, covering by now a considerable part of the New Testament, and dating in some cases from the early part of the second century.

But the very quantity of material is in itself from one point of view a source of embarrassment. The more manuscripts there are, the more scribes also, and the more opportunities for errors to creep into the text. Hence the need for close investigation into all the variations of reading that have been found : and this labour has been given in most abundant measure. Obviously every manuscript must have been copied from another manuscript, right back to the original writing which is no longer extant. The aim of Textual Criticism is as far as possible to eliminate whatever mistakes or changes have found their way into the text, and to arrive

at the words that the author first wrote down. Where many manuscripts contain the same mistakes or peculiar readings we may be sure that they all come eventually from the same manuscript ; and by a careful comparison of all such readings, and of various externals of the text such as chapter-headings, marginal notes and so forth it has been possible to divide all the manuscripts into a few groups or 'families', which recent scholars by the help of quotations by Early Church Fathers have shown reason to believe were connected with the leading Churches of the early centuries. Manuscripts have been examined from a number of different angles and classified in various ways, but the extent of agreement among scholars of today is most notable. No one for example disputes the pre-eminence of the *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*. Even sixty years ago the great textual scholar, Dr. Hort, summed up the position by saying 'the field covered by substantial variations can hardly form more than one thousandth part of the entire text'. There is indeed no ancient text anywhere in the world that has received such minute investigation as has the text of the New Testament. The very shape and size of the letters have been examined and used as a guide to the date and place of the writing of a manuscript. No text has a better claim today to accuracy.

It is true that a number of uncertainties still remain, and many fascinating problems lie ready to hand for those who can devote time to 'Higher' or 'Lower' Criticism. We may not yet be sure in the first realm whether for example it was Paul himself or one of his disciples that wrote Ephesians ; who was the author of Hebrews ; whether our fourth Gospel comes from the Apostle John, or the Presbyter or some other. Again we may remain uncertain whether a given phrase or verse was actually written by the author of the book or was an early insertion. But what has already been found as to the origin and authorship and text of the several books has let in a flood of light on the exegesis of passages for those who have the privilege of being able to use the fruits of the labour of consecrated scholars ; while for those who have not such advantages, the New Testament which was thus so naturally and so humanly written and put together, has nevertheless again and again proved itself to be the very Word of God with power, for rebuke and consolation, for encouragement and salvation. As we read and study the

Scriptures we may well follow the maxim of the textual scholar, Dr. Bengel,

Apply thyself whole-heartedly to the text;

Apply the subject-matter of the text whole-heartedly to thyself.

CHAPTER II

EARLY PREACHING ABOUT CHRIST

The two sources to which we should naturally turn in trying to find out what the first disciples taught and preached about Christ are the early chapters of the book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul. Neither are quite straightforward. 'Acts' was written more than a generation after the events described in the early chapters, and the question of the sources which the author used obviously must be considered. In Paul's letters on the other hand, while we have primary documents, he was addressing Christian communities in local places with local needs and was in the main applying the Gospel to the daily life of the individual or of the Church rather than proclaiming it. We have accordingly to get beneath or behind this application to the fundamental Christian truths which Paul could assume that his readers would accept, and on which he could base his argument or appeal. Nevertheless it is possible to a large extent to reconstruct the early Christian preaching as revealed in Paul's Epistles; and it corresponds in all essential features with what we find in the book of Acts, with which this chapter is mainly concerned.

A. *The Book of the Acts of the Apostles.*

i. *Its name and contents.*—The book is called 'Acts of Apostles', but actually most of the apostles are mentioned once only in the list in ch. 1 : 13. There is more about the Seven brethren (often referred to, though not in the New Testament, as 'Deacons') chosen to assist the apostles than about the apostles themselves. The book deals mostly with Peter and Paul, and it is divided into two nearly equal portions, 1-13 and 14-28. Some have thought that this equal

division of the book is significant, and that care was also taken to describe similar powers and incidents in the life of each great leader. In neither case are more than a few incidents in their careers given.

2. *Sources and authorities.*—Since the book takes the form of an historical narrative one naturally asks whence the writer drew his information. From earliest days this book has been assigned to the author of our third Gospel, and identified with Luke, the physician and the companion of Paul. In the second part of the book there are four passages (16 : 10-17 ; 20 : 5-16 ; 21 : 1-18 ; 27 : 1-28 : 16) spoken of as the 'We' sections, in which the writer unexpectedly introduces the first person plural, indicating that he was an eye-witness of the events that he describes. These sections are so closely woven into the context, cross-references with other parts of the book are so natural and casual, and the unity of style pervading the whole book is so marked that for centuries it was assumed without hesitation that the author of the We sections was also the author of all the narrative. On comparing these four passages with one another and with what we can derive from Paul's letters with regard to the persons mentioned in them we are led, by a process of elimination, to the conclusion that it is the diary of Luke that we are reading. If this be so Luke himself would be the primary authority for the second part of the book, and he would have Paul and his companions from whom to draw for further information. He had, so far as we know, no direct contact with Jerusalem until late in life, and for all the events in the first half of the book he would be dependent upon what he could glean from others ; nor did he lack many points of contact with those who were directly concerned with the early days of the Christian Church. There is, for example, his friendship with John Mark. 'Wherever is S. Paul's epistles', writes Harnack, 'S. Luke's name is found, there also we find the name of S. Mark.' Manson, the host of Paul and Luke between Caesarea and Jerusalem, is described as an early disciple (21 : 16) ; and at Caesarea itself they abode at the house of Philip the evangelist (21 : 8, cp. 6 : 5). Luke would then be familiar with the traditions of the Church at Jerusalem as well as at Antioch, and in the early chapters signs have been found here and there of an underlying Aramaic source.

We have, at the same time, to recognize that it would not have been out of harmony with the literary ethics of those days for an editor to make use of such a diary as Luke's without acknowledgement, and to have incorporated it either verbatim or in a modified form into his narrative. In recent years some scholars have felt compelled to reject the traditional authorship mainly on grounds of historicity and especially of the undoubted difficulty of reconciling the accounts of the actions and teaching of Paul recorded in Acts with what we know of him from his own letters, which has led them to believe that the author cannot himself have been a companion of Paul. Some of the more obvious of the historical problems are the intervention of Gamaliel in 5 : 34 ; the Jerusalem Council in ch. 15, its decree and the results therefrom ; the visits of Paul to Jerusalem, compared with the record given in Gal. 1 and 2 ; the speeches of Paul ; and the large number of omissions of events that are hard to explain on any theory as to the purpose of the book. On the other hand, the author's reputation as an historian has in certain directions been notably enhanced by his proved accuracy in a number of small points where mistakes might so easily have occurred, as in his correct use of local terms, and of official titles in the several cities visited.

With regard to the speeches in the book of Acts no less than fourteen are recorded in direct speech. On many of these occasions the author was not himself present, nor were there available any of the modern methods of recording *verbatim* what is said. It is likely that he followed the traditional Greek custom frankly stated by Thucydides (1. 22) where he writes—'According to my notions of what was most fitting for the several persons to have spoken on each successive occasion, while I adhered as closely as possible to the general sense of what they actually delivered, so have I recorded their speeches'. They have indeed all the appearance of giving the substance of what was spoken tolerably accurately.

Within the frame-work of the book, from the Ascension to Paul's imprisonment in Rome, we cannot fail to be struck by the omission of so many events of which we should like information. The Apostles are mentioned only to be put aside ; the evangelization of Samaria in ch. 8 is not followed up ; Peter disappears after ch. 13, except for his presence

at the Jerusalem Council in ch. 15 ; and as to Paul there is no reference, direct or indirect, to any of his letters, no account of his sojourn in Arabia and Cilicia, special visits to Corinth go unrecorded, one verse dismisses his two years work in and near Ephesus, Titus his friend and disciple is unnamed, and how little is said of the long list of sufferings and dangers referred to in II Cor. 11 : 20-27 ! Most startling of all is the abrupt end of the book with Paul left in prison, preaching the Gospel in Rome. Was the author unexpectedly prevented from finishing his work? had he completed his story up to the time of writing? was he contemplating the writing of a third volume? did he break off at this point dramatically in order to leave an impression of the unimpeded preaching of the Gospel in the Imperial city? Whatever be the answer to these questions and the explanation of the omissions in the work it is clear that we are not being given a full account of the acts of the apostles, nor even of the two Peter and Paul, nor of the Church. It is neither biography nor history in the modern sense. As in the Gospels with their record of the Ministry of Jesus, so here only a very limited selection of incidents has been made. Is there then any indication of what guided this selection?

3. *Purpose of the book.*—Many as are the problems raised by the book many too are the suggestions made as to the aim of the author. We can only summarize some of the views that have been put forward. Thus it was written in order to illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church ; to justify the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles, inasmuch as at every place the Jews had been given the first chance of hearing the word but had rejected it ; to vindicate the actions of both Peter and Paul, or to help towards the reconciliation of Petrine and Pauline factions in the Church ; to trace the steps by which Christianity developed from Judaism to become a world-wide religion, or to describe the extension of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth (1 : 8) ; to show that Christianity was wrongly persecuted, and that wherever Christians had been placed on their trial before a Roman court they had always been acquitted ; to instruct Theophilus regarding the true nature of the Christian faith, especially with a view to the influence that he might exert on behalf of Paul at his coming trial. This last is a peculiarly

attractive suggestion and one that would account for a number of the characteristics of the book, but it would mean that it must have been produced by not later than about A.D. 60. Presumably Acts is later than the third Gospel which is referred to in Acts 1 : 1 as 'the former treatise', and the Gospel of Luke in its turn is later than the Gospel of Mark, and can hardly have been written before A.D. 70-80. The date usually assigned therefore to the Acts is between 80 and 100, the end of the century being the earliest date possible if, as some believe, the author in some places is dependent on Josephus.

Ignorant, then as we are, of the purpose and date of Acts except in general terms, we can draw no safe argument from silences or omissions, and have to be content with nothing that we are dealing with a work containing carefully selected incidents. But from these selections we can discern something of the life and faith of the early Church ; trace the extension of the preaching of the Gospel from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria and the uttermost parts, namely the city of Rome ; see the working of the Holy Spirit in the growth, internally and externally, of the Christian Church ; and learn the nature of the message that the first disciples proclaimed. To this last subject we now turn.

B. *The Preaching about Christ.*

We will consider primarily the addresses of Peter recorded in Acts 2-5, and briefly compare with them his address at the house of Cornelius, the First Epistle of Peter, the sermon of Paul at Antioch, and two passages from the Epistles of Paul.

i. *Acts 2-5.*—We have already noted that we cannot regard the speeches as being a word-for-word record of what was said on any given occasion. At the most they can only be summarized versions. They may largely be Lucan reconstructions. But it is here that signs of Aramaic sources are clearest, and we certainly have a very old tradition and one that was accepted as substantially correct by the Church. There are four addresses, all following much the same line of thought so that they can be taken together. The setting of each is (i) an explanation of the events on the Day of Pentecost (2 : 14-37) ; (ii) an explanation of the healing of the lame man spoken to the crowd (3 : 12-26) ; (iii) the same

addressed to the Council (4 : 5-12) ; and (iv) justification before the Council of their preaching, when they were supposed to be in prison (5 : 29-32). The main points on which these addresses lay stress are five in number—

(a) They are witnessing in these stirring days the *Fulfilment of Prophecy* or the accomplishment of God's purposes in the fulness of the times: thus the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost 'is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel' (2 : 16) ; the betrayal of Jesus was 'by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God' (2 : 23) ; His resurrection was foretold by 'David' in Psalm 16 (2 : 25) ; and His Ascension in Psalm 110 (2 : 34) ; 'The things which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled' (3 : 18) ; Moses spoke of the Advent of Jesus (3 : 22), 'yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days' (3 : 24). Jesus is 'the stone which was set at nought of you the builders, which was made the head of the corner'—from Psalm 118 : 22 (4 : 11).

(b) The central theme of the message is the *Death and Resurrection* of our Lord, with an occasional reference to His Ministry. 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you . . . ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay : whom God raised up' (2 : 22f.) ; 'Ye denied the Holy and Righteous One, . . and killed the Prince of life ; whom God raised from the dead' (3 : 15) ; 'Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in him doth this man stand here before you whole' (4 : 10) ; 'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree' (5 : 30).

(c) The *Result* of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus is that He has been exalted to heaven, while through faith in His Name mighty powers are at work amongst men for the healing of the body and the conversion of the soul :—

'Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear ; Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified' (2 : 33, 36) ; 'By faith in his name

hath his name made this man strong' (3 : 16) ; 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . doth this man stand before you whole' (4 : 10).

(d) The only possible *Response* to these events is *Repentance* unto remission of sins:—

'And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins ; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost' (2 : 38) ; 'Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord' (3 : 19) ; 'And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, wherein we must be saved' (4 : 12) ; 'Him did God exalt with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sin' (5 : 31).

(e) Lastly, there is the insistence on being *Witnesses*, especially of the Resurrection:—

'This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses' (2 : 32) ; 'Whom God raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses' (3 : 15) ; 'We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard' (4 : 20) ; 'And we are witnesses of these things ; and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him' (5 : 32).

'God is working out His purposes and fulfilling His promises made through the prophets and psalmists of old ; accordingly He has sent His Son to minister, to suffer death and to rise again ; He is now exalted at God's right hand, and has sent forth the Holy Spirit upon men. We are witnesses of these things. Therefore repent unto salvation'—such in effect is the early Gospel, and we may note the close parallel with the words in Mark 1 : 15.—'Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel' but now the kingdom of God is Christ.

2. *Acts 10 : 34-43.*—In the address which Peter delivered in the house of Cornelius we find the same five points reappearing. There is a reference to the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus in verses 38-41 ; the witness of Peter and his companions in verse 39, and of all who had seen the Risen Lord in verse 41 ; the exaltation of Christ is seen in the phrase 'he which is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead' (42) ; and in verse 43 is the appeal to the prophets, and invitation to repentance.

3. *I Peter.*—In the first epistle Peter is no longer address-

ing 'Jews' but a community of Christians, and is accordingly relating the Gospel to their daily living. The epistle is hortatory throughout, but all the exhortation is based on the fundamental fact of the Death and Resurrection of Christ. The essence of the matter is contained in the opening doxology in 1 : 3-12 wherein we find four out of our five points again emerging. Thus the fulfilment of prophecy is referred to in vv. 10f.—'Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them'. Indeed in this short letter there are no less than 31 quotations from the Old Testament. The Doxology opens with the words—'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'. Peter makes use of the recollection of the sufferings of Christ as an encouragement to others who suffer, whether they are servants at the hands of their masters (2 : 21), or Christians enduring persecution for righteousness' sake (3 : 18 ; 4 : 1, 13); while the Death and Resurrection alike provide believers with the assurance of their salvation (1 : 19 ; 3 : 21). The 'revelation' of Jesus Christ in glory is mentioned in verse 7, and His exaltation is spoken of again in 3 : 22 and 4 : 11—'that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, whose is the glory and the dominion for ever and ever'. Remission of sins is represented by 'salvation' in verses 5 and 9, while the whole theme of the letter is an exhortation that in spite of the grievous persecution that has broken out among them they should live 'holy lives', for 'ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light' (2 : 9). Lastly, for the thought of witnessing we have to pass on to ch. 5 : 1—'The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed'.

4. *Acts 13 : 16-41.*—Paul in his address to the people of Antioch in Pisidia begins with a reference to the history of

the children of Israel from the time of their captivity in Egypt down to King David: of David's seed God brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus, of whom John the Baptist testified; but the rulers rejected him and 'asked of Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead: and he was seen for many days of them that came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses unto the people' (13 : 28-31).

After another appeal to the scriptures in Psalm 2, Isaiah 55 and Psalm 16, there comes the proclamation—'Be it known unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by him everyone that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses' (38f.).

Here again, then, four of the same five points are emphasized, only the exaltation of Jesus finding no mention in this address.

5. *Pauline Epistles*.—In these epistles also Paul is concentrating more upon teaching the Christian way of life than upon the proclamation of the Gospel, but were we to press the enquiry further we should find the same preaching set forth, and the same fundamental universally-accepted facts assumed as the basis on which the Christian Gospel should be applied to daily living. It must suffice to refer to two well-known passages where Paul is obviously reciting facts which he knows that his readers will accept with the same conviction and certainty as himself.

One of the questions with which he had to deal in writing to the Church at Corinth was whether there was really any resurrection life for Christians after their physical death. He bases his answer on the accepted fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15). In the first four verses there is reference to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ; He died 'for our sins'; (cp. v. 17) twice over it is emphasized that all took place 'according to the scriptures': Later, mention is made of His Reign (v. 24f.); and in verse 15 we read—

'Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we witnessed of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead are not raised.'

When he wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul was addressing a community that he had not as yet visited. In his opening paragraph he desires to introduce both himself and his Gospel to his readers, and in doing so he states the facts on which the Christian faith is based, their acceptance of which he can rely upon. Again we find ourselves in the same circle of ideas, only the witnessing being absent:—

'by his prophets in the holy scriptures' . . . 'concerning his Son . . . who was declared to be the Son of God with power' . . . 'by the resurrection of the dead' . . . 'through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith among all the nations'.

That then in brief was the Gospel, the Preaching of the Early Church about Christ. In Him there is a revelation of God's eternal purpose, foretold by the prophets of old, and now fulfilled in Jesus Christ, Who ministered, died and rose again for us and for remission of our sins, Who is now exalted at God's right hand. We are witnesses of these things. Therefore repent and be baptised. And such is our Proclamation, our Gospel today.

CHAPTER III

THE EARTHLY MINISTRY OF JESUS

As we noticed in the first chapter there never was any attempt in the early days of the Church to write a life of Jesus of Nazareth. For many years after the Ascension His Second Coming was imminently expected, and the time and thought of the disciples was taken up with the proclamation that the Messiah had come in the Person of Jesus Christ, that though put to death by men He had been raised by God, and the call to the nation was to repent. That at length the need was felt for a written account of what Jesus had done and taught was probably due in the main to three causes,—the delay in the 'Parousia' or Second Advent, and the consequent decrease by death in the number of those who had been eye-witnesses of His Ministry; the growth of the Church in districts beyond the borders of Palestine, where no eye-witnesses could be appealed to; and the problems met with by the expanding Christian community which wanted to know what

the Master had had to say or what His attitude had been on one subject and another. To meet these needs there was still no sign of any biography being attempted, by collections of sayings and incidents were made that would be useful for the Church's life, and Luke (1 : 1) tells us there were many who had undertaken such narratives. The next stage was the composition of our four Gospels, the first three of which, spoken of together as the 'Synoptic Gospels', are the theme of this chapter.

A. *The Synoptic Gospels.*

1. The *Synoptists* are so called because they 'look at things together' from the same general standpoint. When Peter was addressing the company assembled in the house of Cornelius he spoke of Jesus as one 'who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him', and that is a very fair account of at least a large part of the picture given us by these writers. They describe Jesus in the country and in the town, in the intimate companionship of His disciples or followed by an importunate crowd, healing the sick and giving teaching to the multitudes—about the Kingdom of God and the Fatherhood of God, and His love for men,—and summoning them in turn to fulfil the law of love for God and for one's neighbour, and calling them to discipleship. He spoke in parables which could be readily remembered and pondered over, full of spiritual truth to those who had ears to hear ; and He found His illustrations in the most ordinary articles and happenings of village and town life.

Moreover, broadly speaking the three evangelists follow the same outline,—the preaching of John the Baptist, the Baptism of Jesus, followed by His temptation, His Galilean Ministry with the one visit to Syro-Phoenicia culminating with the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi, the long journey up to Jerusalem, (Luke has here a long 'central section' of his own containing a large number of parables, 9 : 51—19 : 27), the last week of the Ministry spent in Jerusalem closing with the passion and death of Jesus told in far greater detail, and finally the resurrection.

2. Comparison between the three Gospels reveals some interesting facts. In the first place nearly all of the Gospel

of Mark is to be found in either Matthew or Luke, all except the account of two healings (7 : 31-37 ; 8 : 23-26), one parable, that of the seed growing secretly (4 : 26-29), and the incident of the young man who fled at the time of Jesus' arrest (14 : 51-52). In other words of Mark's 661 verses Matthew reproduces in substance 606, and of the remaining 55 verses Luke has parallels to 24, leaving only 31 purely Marcan verses. Secondly, between the accounts of the Baptism and the Death of our Lord, Matthew and Luke, apart from those verses that they have in common with Mark, have some 200 verses in common with one another. Often, however, these verses appear in different contexts, in quite different parts of the Gospels: sometimes, as in the account of the preaching of John the Baptist, the words are almost identical (cp. Mat. 3 : 7-10 with Lk. 3 : 7-9), while at other times the divergence is far greater as in the case where the Beatitudes of Mat. 5 have as their counterpart the four Beatitudes and four Woes of Lk. 6. Thirdly, where two of the Synoptists agree and the third disagrees, as for example in the order of events, Mark is always found to be on the side of the majority.

3. There are also certain differences between the three no less striking than their resemblances. Firstly, while Matthew and Luke have separately or together many verses in common with Mark, and in addition have a number in common with one another, each has also characteristic material of his own. This is notably the case with regard to the Birth stories at the beginning and the Resurrection appearances at the end of the Gospels, all of which are different. Similarly many of the parables are to be found in one Gospel only. Secondly, each writer has his own style. From the point of view of literary Greek, Luke shares with the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews the distinction of writing the purest Greek, and he has too the eye of an artist: often he produces an effect by vivid contrast, as in ch. 2 : 1-7, Caesar Augustus and the Babe in the manger. Mark is much the roughest of the three, is not afraid to introduce colloquialisms into his composition, and often employs Aramaic and Latin words transliterated. Matthew avoids the harshnesses of Mark, but still writes 'translation Greek', and seems over-influenced by his fondness for numbers, so that we find artificial and mechanical arrangements to form a series of three, five or seven. Thirdly,

we can also discern special points of interest. Matthew is always on the look out for fulfilment of prophecy, and his Gospel abounds in quotations from the Old Testament. Much of the teaching of our Lord is presented in a form that suggests Old Testament proverbs and maxims. And there is in this Gospel a somewhat strange mixture of Jewish particularism with the universalism of the Gospel. Luke's eyes on the other hand are clearly directed towards the Gentile world ; he is the champion of the foreigner, the outcast, of the poor and oppressed, of women and children ; prayer and praise are frequently on his lips, and he speaks of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of mercy and forgiveness, of joy and peace.

4. In view of these comparisons and contrasts is it possible to form some idea as to the *relationship* existing between the three Gospels? It is undoubtedly that all the early proclamation of the Gospel was done by word of mouth, and it is possible that a number of incidents and teachings of Jesus were taught to evangelists and ordinary Church members to help them in passing on the Good News to others ; but it has long been recognized that this 'oral hypothesis' (as it has been called) to explain the relationship between the Gospels is in itself insufficient to account for both the similarities and the differences between them. A 'documentary hypothesis' is unavoidable. There is general agreement today that the Gospel of Mark was the first of the three to be composed, and was used more or less in its present form by the other two evangelists ; but while Matthew used it as the framework in which to insert other material that he wished to include, Luke seems rather to have added selections from Mark to a narrative he had already composed. But Mark itself is not an original composition, but rather a compilation and collection in written form of a number of incidents and teachings of our Lord used first by Peter, according to tradition, and then by others after him in their preaching. In recent years scholars have drawn attention to the fact that many of the sections describing a saying or an action of Jesus follow the same lines. A question is asked, the reply of Jesus is given, and the effect on the hearers is described. Or in the case of cures the circumstances of the illness are recounted, the method of achieving the healing, and the impression created. 'Form Criticism', which is the name given to this particular method of approach, has made it its aim to show that the

material in our Gospels has been carefully selected from a much larger mass available for a special purpose such as to preserve a saying of our Lord which would have particular moral or religious value for the life of the Church, or to illustrate the nature of Jesus, His sympathy, His power to heal and so forth.

The fact that both Matthew and Luke made use of Mark will account for the resemblances in a large part of the Gospels, but leaves untouched those 200 verses in which Matthew and Luke have much in common. Again it seems necessary to assume the existence of some document used by both writers, and to this the symbol Q (the first letter in the German word Quelle meaning a 'source') has been given. Matthew appears to have regarded it as a secondary authority in comparison with the Gospel of Mark, whereas Luke gives it a higher place. It consisted almost entirely of teaching, with just enough narrative to give the required setting.

5. Can we now from the materials before us in some measure reconstruct the history of the composition of our Gospels? We begin with oral preaching which soon resulted in the fixation of a number of short stories of incidents in the Ministry of Jesus that were found of special value in apologetic and evangelistic work or in the edification of the Christian community. Then came the committal of such stories to writing, as suggested in Lk. 1 : 1 ; and the collection of Sayings into the document Q, for which A.D. 50 has been suggested as the approximate date, and Antioch as a likely place.

Of the origin of Mark's Gospel there is a well-known tradition that comes to us from Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia (c. A.D. 140) who quotes a statement by John the Presbyter (c. A.D. 110): the fragment runs as follows:—

'This also the presbyter said: Mark, who had been Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, all that he recollects of what Christ had said or done. For he was not a hearer of the Lord, nor a follower of his; he followed Peter, as I have said, at a later date, and Peter adapted his instructions to practical needs, without any attempt to give the Lord's words systematically. So that Mark was not wrong in writing down some things in this way from memory, for his own concern was neither to omit nor to falsify anything he had heard.'

Other tradition tells us that this took place after the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul in Rome, and a date round about

A.D. 65 is widely accepted. If it thus became the first and recognized Gospel in Rome it would adequately explain how it was that although later it was so completely incorporated in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke it nevertheless preserved its own identity.

There is no such definite tradition regarding the Gospel of Luke. Canon Streeter suggests that Luke may well have busied himself in collecting material (1 : 3) as the companion of Paul on his travels, and especially during his imprisonment at Caesarea, and have produced a first edition of his work,—a 'Proto-Luke'—consisting of these personal researches—'L'—and the collection of sayings, Q: later he came across a mutilated copy of Mark's Gospel, sections of which he incorporated in his earlier work and put the whole together primarily for Theophilus, in Corinth in about A.D. 80. Whatever be the exact details a date between 80 and 90, and Greece as the place of writing would be generally received as probable.

The fragment quoted above giving the tradition about Mark's Gospel handed down by Papias closes with these words—'So then Matthew composed the Logia in the Hebrew language, and everyone interpreted them as he was able'. This cannot refer to our first Gospel which contains so much of Mark; but many have thought that the Logia (or 'Sayings') is the Aramaic document underlying 'Q'. This would account for the association of Matthew's name with the first Gospel. The date of Matthew is again probably between A.D. 80 and 90, and the place somewhere in Palestine. Canon Streeter fills in the details by a most attractive reconstruction. He takes us to Antioch, whither a number of the Christians had fled when others went to Pella on the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. They brought with them the traditions of the Church in Jerusalem—M'—and found Q on their arrival, while Mark's Gospel arrived shortly afterwards from Rome. These three documents reflected different viewpoints in the Christian Church, M being conservatively Judaistic, Q neutral, and Mark liberal. In this they corresponded in part to the three great leaders all of whom had now laid down their lives as martyrs,—S. James, S. Peter, and S. Paul. The missionary spirit was alive in this great Christian centre, and the time was ripe for a fresh and fuller Gospel which would harmonize the various positions held by members of the

Christian Church. So Matthew's Gospel came to be written.

Be these things as they may we now have before us three Gospels all composed before A.D. 100 and widely accepted by the Church of that day as being essentially accurate. Though 'synoptic' each of the evangelists has his own contribution to make and each is complementary to the others ; and from them primarily we derive our knowledge of the earthly Ministry of Jesus.

B. *The Purpose of the Coming of Jesus—according to Mark.*

- All the three Synoptists, as we have seen, follow much the same order of events from the Baptism of Jesus up to His Death and Resurrection. But Mark omits all references to His birth, and the end of the Gospel is mutilated, so that though the Resurrection is recorded (16 : 6) there are no 'appearance' stories. (16 : 9-20 is but a brief summary of appearances drawn from other sources, and concisely narrated to form an end to the Gospel in place of the lost conclusion). What is the impression left upon our minds? It is not a consecutive story. Though each incident referred to took place on a separate day, still we should have a glimpse of forty days only. Possibly even the outline of the story is chronologically incorrect, for Mark it is said 'wrote down accurately though not in order', though probably the main landmarks in the Ministry stand in their right order. Jesus 'went about doing good' teaching and healing the sick. Is there anything more? The teaching and healing are not isolated incidents, but have a purpose in them and do more than express the sympathy that Jesus had towards all who were in need. They were to help towards bringing men and women into what was for them a new world, into God's world, in place of the world of their own imaginations in which they were living, into a world where God's Reign is recognized, where His Will is done, and where His power is at work.

Let us select as illustrative passages from the Synoptic Gospels certain verses in Mark's Gospel which help us to understand more about the New Covenant and the part that Jesus Himself takes in it.

1. *The Proclamation.*—Mk. 1 : 15. 'Jesus came, preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in

the gospel'. That then gives us the theme. The past is preparatory and full of promises ; now is the time for their fulfilment. We are reminded of the account given in Luke's Gospel of the beginning of our Lord's Ministry, how he went to Nazareth where He had been brought up, entered into the synagogue, read the scriptures from Isaiah 61, and then said, 'Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears'. The coming of Jesus meant the coming of the kingdom, for the kingdom is wherever God's rule is recognized, where there is obedience to His will in place of rebellion, and fellowship with God in place of aloofness and separation through sin. Hence the call to repent, that is, to change one's mind, to adopt new thoughts of God and of man, to live a new life in relation to the new and truer conception of God. But how can this come about?

2. *Christ's dealing with Sin.*—The difference between the old world in which men were living and the new world in which Christ Himself lived was due to the presence in the former of sin, the most universal factor in all human experience and yet so constantly and amazingly left out of account. Early in the Ministry of Jesus there was brought to Him in Capernaum 'a man sick of the palsy, borne of four And Jesus seeing their faith saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son thy sins are forgiven'. Naturally He was accused of blasphemy.

'who can forgive sins but one, even God?' To which Jesus replied—'Whether is easier, to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven ; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thy house'. (Mk. 2 : 1-12.)

In the very next paragraph His reply to the Pharisees who protested against His eating with sinners and publicans in the house of Levi was—

'They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'

There are many problems and evils in life, personal, corporate, national ; physical, mental, economic, political ; but all are trifling and insignificant compared with this all-important problem of sin. For sin is not the commission of gross acts that offend against the Decalogue, or against the instincts of humanity, against conventions or against the laws of the

land: but sin is existing in God's world and yet in a world of our own apart from God; it is aloofness and selfishness, out of which spring all the acts of sin that work havoc amongst mankind. Little more is said about sin as such in this Gospel, but the whole story reveals the gulf between the two worlds, that in which Christ lived in conscious fellowship with his Father, and that in which even the best of His contemporaries was living.

3. *The Death of Christ.*—We pass on to a series of references in which Jesus speaks of His approaching Death:—

Mk. 8: 31; 9: 31; 10: 33—the triple prediction, 'The Son of Man must suffer'.

10: 45—For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

12: 1ff.—In the parable of the vineyard. 'They will reverence my son': 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him . . .' 'And they took him and killed him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard.'

14: 8—'She hath done what she could: she hath anointed my body beforehand for the burying'.

14: 22-24—'And as they were eating, he took bread, and when he had blessed, he brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take ye: this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many.'

If will be noticed that all these references come from the period after the great confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Mk. 8: 27-30). From that time Jesus is depicted as withdrawing Himself to some extent from the crowd and concentrating His attention on the Twelve to whom in intimate fellowship He could lay bare His inmost thoughts. Again and again He spoke to them of His approaching death and the necessity of it. From the human standpoint it was indeed inevitable that sinful men must fight against such outstanding goodness and try to bring about the death of Him who was Truth Incarnate: that is intelligible to us from the tragedy of human experience. But there was also a Divine necessity which must ever remain in part a mystery to us. The way by which the old bad world was to give place to God's world, the way of atonement and reconciliation between sinful men and the holy God must be the way of the Cross. No attempt is made in this Gospel to explain the reason of this mystery

but the records leave us in no doubt that Jesus knew what the New Covenant was to mean for Him. We see Him at the supreme crisis of His life at night in a 'place which was named Gethsemane' in closest fellowship with His Father in heaven, and yet so inextricably involved in the sin of man, when He Himself was about to become the very centre and unwilling cause of man's greatest act of sin.

'And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; remove this cup from me: howbeit not what I will, but what thou wilst.'

So He made afresh this offering of His life in perfect obedience to the holy will of God His Father, and His blood that was shed was the 'blood of the Covenant'.

From this earliest account, then, that has come down to us of what Jesus did and taught in His earthly Ministry, an account too that has no apparent theological leanings or intentions, the impression we derive is that in accordance with the opening proclamation Jesus came to introduce a new order on earth through the setting up of a new relationship between God and man: this became possible by His own life and death upon the Cross, in conformity with the holy will of God, to Whom in life and in death Jesus was the perfectly obedient Son.

CHAPTER IV

'JESUS IS THE CHRIST'

In the last chapter we were considering the origin and message of our first three Gospels, often spoken of together as the Synoptic Gospels. But the Christian Church since the second part of the second century at least has always thought in terms of the Four Gospels. So we turn now to the Fourth Gospel, the chief in the group of five books in the Canon known as

A. *The Johannine Literature.*

I. *Scope of the literature.*—Of the five books concerned only the Revelation claims to have been written by 'John';

the 2nd and 3rd Epistles are by 'The Elder' or 'Presbyter': the Gospel and 1st Epistle are by one who claims to be an eye-witness, but no name is mentioned. Since the fourth century it has been widely held that Revelation is by a separate author from the other books, so different are the ideas expressed and the vocabulary used, while the Greek follows rules of grammar and syntax that are peculiar to itself. There are close similarities between the Gospel and 1st Epistle, and the majority of scholars assign them to the same author, whilst 2nd and 3rd John seem to belong to 1st John. The controversy that raged for many years over the authorship of these writings, and especially of the Gospel, has now died down,—not because the dispute is settled, the problem solved; far from it; but rather because it is recognized that, immensely helpful though it would be were we to know who the author was, it is not the most important point about the book. It carries, indeed, its authority (which is the vital matter) with it, and what concerns us is that we should try and interpret it aright.

2. *Outline of the Gospel.*—The Gospel consists of a short Prologue, four main sections, and an appendix. At one time the unity of the Gospel used to be likened to the seamless coat of our Lord of which the author speaks (19:23). Subsequently attempts were made to explain some of the undoubtedly difficulties in the text by the introduction of editors or redactors, but very many scholars today would say that the worst that may have happened to the original writing is the dislocation of certain passages through the separate leaves falling at an early date into the wrong order. The most doubted chapter is the last, 21. The Gospel then consists of—

The Prologue; i : 1-18 A hymn to the Logos or Word, and the Baptist's Witness.

Section i; i : 19-6 Mainly in Galilee, but including the cleansing of the Temple, and conversation with the Woman of Samaria. Mostly too concerned with individuals.

ii; 7-12 Mainly in Jerusalem; controversial; discourses with 'the Jews' concerning the Person of Christ.

iii; 13-17 Our Lord's last talk with His disciples, and His consecration prayer.

iv; 18-20 The arrest, trial, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Appendix ; 21 Appearances of the Risen Lord to His disciples, especially Peter, in Galilee.

3. *Comparison with the Synoptic Gospels.*—It is difficult to find words to describe this accurately. The first impression left upon the mind in our childhood is surely that we are still reading the same old story as in the earlier Gospel's, about the same Beloved Teacher, and His intimate group of disciples ; —but that impression may in part be due to the fact that we used to read the easier and more familiar chapters. The second impression that comes from a closer reading is of very startling differences ; while the third is that beneath these differences there is an underlying similarity in essential points. But it is important to recognize that the differences are there. Here are some of the more obvious :—

(a) Chronology and scene of the Ministry: According to the Synoptists our Lord accomplished most of his work in Galilee, and visited Jerusalem only at the close. The whole could have taken place within a single year. In the Fourth Gospel, judging by the Festivals mentioned, the Ministry lasted for three years, and there was much journeying to and fro, the main scene however being Jerusalem. The cleansing of the Temple, placed at the beginning of the Ministry in John, is the immediate cause of the arrest of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Again in the Synoptists Jesus apparently ate the Passover Feast with His disciples on the night on which He was betrayed, but in John He was crucified before the Festival, at the time when the paschal lambs were being slain in preparation for the evening meal.

(b) Incidents in the Gospel story: According to the Synoptists John the Baptist, while being the Forerunner, is also a prophet as it were in his own right, like one of the prophets of old, and completes his work as a social reformer before Jesus began His Ministry: in the Fourth Gospel his sole function is to 'bear witness concerning the light', and some amount of emphasis is laid on the inferiority of the Baptist to Jesus. Again, there is a notable difference in the accounts given of the faith of those who met Jesus. Over against the perplexed question of the Baptist in prison, 'Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?' (Lk. 7:19) there is the confident and complete confession of faith, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' (Jn. 1:29). Similarly, in the first chapter of

John we have the witness of Andrew,—‘We have found the Messiah’,—of Philip,—‘We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write’,—and of Nathaniel,—‘Rabbi, thou art the Son of God ; thou art King of Israel’. There is no place in this Gospel for the gradual development of faith in the hearts of the disciples culminating in Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi, ‘Thou art the Christ’ (Mk. 8:29) such as we read of in the Synoptists. Nor does the Transfiguration of Jesus find a place in the Fourth Gospel which from beginning to end records the manifestation of the Word become flesh.

We note too that from the beginning of the Ministry up to the entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week the only incidents that the four Gospels have in common are those of the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the sea (Mk. 6 ; Jn. 6) in which there are interesting small points of difference. ‘Omissions’ from John include the accounts of the Temptation, call of the twelve, Caesarea Philippi, the Transfiguration, the bread and the cup at the last supper, and the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, though in some cases we seem to find the same spiritual experience described in other words or in another setting: cp. Jn. 6:69 with the confession at Caesarea Philippi, for example ; Jn. 6:52-59 with Mt. 26:26-29 ; and Jn. 12:27 with Mk. 14:34-36. On the other hand Nicodemus, the woman of Samaria, the raising of Lazarus, and the disciple whom Jesus loved are unmentioned in the Synoptic account.

(c) The teaching of our Lord is markedly different in the Fourth Gospel, both in form and in substance. In the Synoptists, as we have seen, Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, the Fatherhood of God, the right manner of life for men to live in relation to God and to one another ; and He utters short, memorable sayings, illustrated by parables and similes drawn from the most familiar articles and incidents of daily life. In John we find long discourses on transcendental themes, all directed in the end to a revelation of the Person and work of Christ ; and the style is frequently that of Rabbinical controversy, in the course of which some very harsh sayings against the ‘Jews’ or opponents of Jesus are found in His mouth exceeding the stern denunciation of the Pharisees in the first three Gospels.

(d) Circumstances of the writing of this Gospel: This brief

glance at the contents of the Fourth Gospel and the comparison with the other three Gospels shows that the standpoint and purpose of the author differ from those of the Synoptists. This becomes yet clearer when we remember that in place of the stories of our Lord's birth, John begins with the Logos prologue,—identifying Jesus of Nazareth with the Word of God, who was in the beginning with God, and the Word was God: 'and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory'. And he closes the main body of his work in 20:31 with the words—'These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing, ye may have life in his name'. What is important for us is that we should try and gain some understanding of the conditions under which this Gospel was written and of the aim in view. Conclusions must in part be tentative, but the contents of the Gospel itself, tradition and modern scholarship point us in the following direction.

The time is the turn of the century, A.D. 95-105, and the place is Asia Minor ; tradition has always connected the composition with Ephesus. 'John' had been teaching there for many years. Here our traditions conflict: while we have always been taught to regard the author as the Apostle John there is another tradition that tells of that Apostle's comparatively early martyrdom, while another speaks of a well-known Presbyter John also resident in Ephesus. It may well be that the evangelist is the Presbyter John, himself a disciple of the Apostle, whose authority and reminiscences as an eye-witness lie behind the evangelist's record. Be that as it may, the result of John's ministry in Ephesus has been the ingathering into the Church of some of the more highly educated Greeks who had been attracted by his presentation of the Gospel, but for whom there was no suitable or adequate Christian literature to place in their hands. (How familiar and modern this sounds to us in India!) The Gospel in use was that of Mark, circulated from Rome ; but the style was somewhat crude for the refined taste of these cultured men. Some at least of the letters of Paul were also familiar, but there was not a great deal in them about the earthly ministry of our Lord, and indeed some might find it hard to discover the relationship between the 'Jesus of history' as depicted by Mark, and the 'Christ of experience' met with in the letters of Paul. Moreover, there was still a sect of the Jews who

gave the pre-eminence to John the Baptist, as others had done a generation earlier (Acts 19:1-7); there were Jews who rejected altogether the Messiahship of Christ, Greeks who could not bring themselves to accept the reality of the Incarnation, and Christians who were excited about the Second Coming. In the light of all these local circumstances John sets himself to write a new Gospel, or rather the old Gospel in a new form.

He boldly begins by taking a word 'logos' that had both Greek and Hebrew associations—Word, Reason, Idea, in Greek Philosophy; Word, Wisdom of God in Jewish thought. It is probable that while it was a word in common usage it did not carry too definite a connotation, but it would suggest to Greek and Jew alike a way by which God was wont to make a revelation of Himself and His will to men. John begins with a reference, then, to this 'Word', but at once goes on to say that his theme is not a philosophical treatise, but the 'Word become flesh', as actually seen in Jesus of Nazareth. This he amplifies by a series of scenes from the life of our Lord: and for his purpose a real historic basis to his Gospel is essential. His intention is to show how God revealed Himself at a given time in a given place in the history of the world; and at the same time to show that everything that was said or done by Jesus had not only local and temporal significance but were revelations also of the eternal heart of God. His readers were familiar with the Gospel of Mark, and John assumes that knowledge and sometimes appears deliberately to correct the earlier account in certain details, which he could not have done—nor would it in any case have been accepted by the Church of his time—had his recognized claim to authority not been secure. He did not indeed concern himself so much with the actual words spoken by Jesus, for while the Jews were more interested in words than in persons (as the many anonymous writings of the Old Testament suggest) the Greeks for whom John was primarily writing desired rather to gain an impression of the person. Thus in the early chapters John the Baptist, Nicodemus, the evangelist and Jesus all use much the same language and it is difficult to know where one ends and another begins speaking. And further he makes use of many of the thought-forms of his own day, so that often we seem to be listening to the problems and controversies

of the close of the first century in Asia Minor rather than to those of Palestine in A.D. 30 ; and to hear the words of Jesus mingled with those of the evangelist and reinterpreted for application to the needs of the new age. Yet with it all in essence the Gospel that he delivers is the same as that preached by the early Church, recounted in the Synoptic Gospels, and demonstrated in the Epistles of Paul. With the latter, indeed, contrasts have often been drawn, and there is a change of emphasis to meet the changed environment, but constantly we find an idea adumbrated in Paul taken up and elaborated in the Fourth Gospel. Finally we may note that while this Gospel makes more appeal than any other book of the New Testament to adherents of other faiths, it is nevertheless one of the most aggressively 'Christian' ; it speaks, as do other writers in measure, of peace and joy and fellowship with God, but nowhere is it more insisted upon than here that Jesus is the one true way: 'No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him' (Jn. 1:18). 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life : no one cometh unto the Father, but by me' (Jn. 14:16).

B. *John 5 : 7:15-24.*

The best known parts of this Gospel are probably chapters 18-21 with their full and vivid account of the trial of Jesus, where we receive the impression that throughout He is Himself Judge rather than prisoner at the bar, of His Death again with the triumphant cry 'It is finished!', and of His Resurrection. Chapters 13-17 are frequently read, containing the words of Jesus to His disciples on the betrayal night. And the first four chapters, describing the meeting of Jesus with His first disciples, and His conversation with Nicodemus and with the woman of Samaria are also familiar. Some of the intervening chapters, including the discourse on the Bread of Life, the simile of the Good Shepherd, and the Raising of Lazarus, are more difficult of interpretation. As an illustration of the method adopted by the author, and of one important aspect of his message, let us turn to chapter 5, to which the section in 7 : 15-24 seems to be the natural conclusion, unless indeed we are also to read in the same connection ch. 8:12-20.

1. John 5 : 7:15-24. *The outline.*

- (a) 5 : 1-9a. The healing of the man who had had an infirmity for 38 years, at the pool of Bethesda.
- (b) 9b-16 Objection brought against Jesus because He had done this work on a Sabbath day.
- (c) 17-18 A more serious charge, that Jesus had made himself equal with God. This leads up to the real theme of the chapter, which is a discourse on the Person of Christ and His relationship to the Father.
- (d) 19-47 The Person of Christ.
 - 19-20—His subordination to the Father:
 - 21-29—Yet having delegated authority, of which two examples are given:—
 - the power to bestow life:
 - the power of judgement.
 - 30-47—Evidence concerning Himself—from God, which they will not accept
 - (30-32)
 - from John the Baptist (33-35)
 - from His works (36-38)
 - from the Scriptures and Moses (39-47).
- (e) 7 : 15-24 The law of Moses and the Sabbath. Righteous judgement.

2. John 5 : some special comments.

(a) A comparison of the Authorized and Revised Versions of the English New Testament will show that verse 4 is lacking in the text of the Revised, and is to be found in the margin (cp. p. 7 above). Neither *Codex Vaticanus* nor *Codex Sinaiticus* nor several other of our better authorities contain these words, which however are found in the majority of the later manuscripts. They have all the appearance of having been originally a note placed in the margin to explain verse 7.

(b) The first complaint brought by 'the Jews' is addressed to the cured man and has reference to his carrying his bed about on the Sabbath. 'The Jews' is used in this Gospel almost in a technical sense to represent the opponents of Jesus. The 'krabbaton' or bed that he carried is the same word as that used in the story of the healing of the paralysed man in Mk. 2, where we find a similar spiritual experience in a slightly different setting. In both cases the cure arouses the wrath of Jesus' enemies: Jesus' words to the sick men are almost identical: both stories lead up to the question of Jesus' relationship to God,—'Who can forgive sins but one, even God?' He 'called God his own Father'. The offence was a grievous one, for death was according to Rabbinic law the penalty for anyone found guilty of carrying anything from a public to a private place on the Sabbath, though a bed with a living man on it might lawfully so be borne.

Presently the charge of working on the Sabbath was brought against Jesus Himself. This is also one of the chief causes of hostility against Him on the part of the Pharisees in the Synoptic story. The simplest answer of our Lord to the accusation is that recorded in the form of a question in Mk. 3 : 4—'Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good, or to do harm? to save a life, or to kill?' In Mk. 2 : 25 there had been an appeal to precedent,—'Did ye never read what David did, when he had need and was an hungered . . . ?' and then follows the general principle,—'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: so that the son of man is lord even of the sabbath'. Here Jesus claims to be acting as the true Son of his Father.

Does God indeed work on the sabbath? This was a question hotly debated among the Rabbis in view of Gen. 2 : 3—'God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it: because that in it he rested from all his works which God had created and made'. Yet it was God's nature to work, and if He ceased to give life all creation would surely cease to exist! So it was commonly held that God rested only from creative activity, but not from maintaining and preserving His creation.

(c) Up to this point, however, important though the sabbath controversy was, we have had only the introduction to the real theme. According to his regular practice John has started with an incident in our Lord's ministry, to lead up to his main subject. The sick man, having played his part, passes out of the story as do Nicodemus in ch. 3, the Greek enquirers in ch. 12 and others. So too does the working on the sabbath, and we come to the relationship of Jesus Christ to God the Father.

(d) Jesus first asserts the subordination of the Son to the Father. 'The Son can do nothing of himself, not because of his impotence, but because I and the Father are one' (10 : 30) and it is morally impossible for the Son to act apart from the Father. What God does eternally Jesus manifests here on earth. Two definite examples of functions that belong to God but are nevertheless performed by Jesus on earth are then given, the power to 'quicken whom he will' and the power of judgement, the two being inextricably bound up with one another.

'Life' is one of the key-notes of the Gospel. 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men' we read in the Prologue. The shortest description of the purpose of the coming of Jesus is contained in Jn. 10 : 10—I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly'. And if we ask what life is, we are told—'This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ' (Jn. 17 : 3). Eternal life in this Gospel in large measure takes the place of the 'Kingdom of God' in the other evangelists, which is a term that John uses only in the story of Nicodemus. To Jesus was given both to have life in himself and to be a life-giver. All who came into touch with Jesus were judged not so much by him as by the response that they themselves made. (This Gospel has been called the Gospel of acceptance and rejection). A further judgement there may be in the future, and room is left for the traditional belief

in such a day (v. 29), but this is only the culmination of a process that is already at work, and 'he that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgement but hath passed out of death into life' (v. 24). The Jewish mind made less distinction than we normally do between spiritual and physical death, and the author passes lightly from the one to the other in verses 25 and 28. For him the all important is not the death of the body but the rebirth of the soul by response to Jesus who is 'the resurrection and the life' (11 : 25) fellowship in and with whom involves fellowship with God and eternal life.

(e) In the last part of the discourse we come to a typical passage of controversial argument, in which Jesus mentions various lines of evidence that his opponents might accept in support of his claims. In verse 31 he accepts for the moment the Jewish point of view according to which a man's testimony about himself cannot be accepted as valid evidence. (Contrast 8 : 14 where Jesus is speaking absolutely, in his own name). Still accepting their limited vision he refers them to John the Baptist, whose witness however they have misunderstood. His real witness is God Himself, and if they cannot accept Him as witness because they cannot see or hear Him, at least they should be able to recognize the authority of God in the works that Jesus was doing. Lastly there is the appeal to the scriptures which do indeed speak of Jesus, but when he comes in person they are unable or unwilling to receive him.

The Jews are amazed at Jesus' knowledge of the scriptures when he had to their knowledge received no regular rabbinical training (7 : 15), and Jesus again urged upon them that they could understand him only if they acknowledged that he did in fact receive his teaching from God Himself. In their insistence upon the letter, instead of the spirit, of the law they merely involved themselves in inconsistencies, and formed false and superficial judgements.

Thus in this, as in other chapters, the truth is pressed home that in rejecting the claims of Jesus men do but judge themselves. But 'these things are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ; and that believing ye may have life in his name'.

CHAPTER V

CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

Had we been dealing with the 'history and message of the New Testament' in a chronological order from the point of view of the composition of the literature contained in it we should have had to begin our study with the Epistles of Paul,

which were being written to the recently formed Christian Churches at much the same time as incidents and sayings in the life of our Lord were just beginning to be recorded, and before any of our Gospels had been published. But the message is of more importance than the history of the documents, and accordingly it was desirable to see first what the early disciples taught about Jesus, and then what records there were about his life and teaching before coming to what is largely the application of them in the life of the individual disciple and of the Church. Thus in turning to the letters of Paul we shall be considering the earliest body of Christian literature that is extant.

A. *The Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul.*

I. *His Life.*—From what we can read in the book of Acts and especially in his own letters we can form a tolerably accurate impression of the man himself and of the general outline of his life, but more detailed knowledge is hard to come by on account of a number of uncertainties. He was born about the beginning of the Christian era in the city of Tarsus, capital of the Roman Province of Cilicia, and a sea-port town to which came ships from many ports of the Mediterranean. There he received his early education, presumably attended the University, and like other Jewish boys was taught a trade as well as the law. For his further education he was sent up to Jerusalem where he sat at the feet of the Rabbi Gamaliel. He was proud of belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, of following the law in accordance with the strict tenets of the Pharisees, and at the same time of being a Roman citizen free-born. Scholarly and intensely religious he could not at first reconcile the Way of Jesus with his study of the scriptures; he was present at the martyrdom of S. Stephen, 'consenting unto his death', and became the arch-persecutor of the newly-formed Christian Church. Then in response to his earnest seeking, and influenced probably to a large extent by the manner of Stephen's death he experienced conversion. Thereafter his quiet studies were to give place to constant missionary travelling, his popularity among his Jewish companions to bitter hatred, and the restless dissatisfaction of his mind and spirit to the peace of being at one with the will of God.

After a short stay in Arabia he returned to Damascus where he had been baptized, and then went up to Jerusalem where the Church leaders were prevailed upon to receive him only by the kind offices of Barnabas. There followed a period of some fourteen years spent in comparative seclusion in Cilicia, until he was summoned back to Antioch to help in a Christian evangelistic movement that seemed full of promise. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Saul for missionary work, and his first journey took him to Cyprus and several cities in Pisidia and south Galatia. The success of the preaching in winning converts among the Gentiles aroused suspicion and envy in the more conservative Jewish Christians, so that a Council was held at Jerusalem to consider the whole matter. Proceeding on a second tour Paul and his party passed through Asia Minor and crossed over into Europe, turning south from Philippi into Macedonia and Achaia, where he spent over eighteen months at Corinth before returning by way of Ephesus to Jerusalem. With hardly any interval he set out again and spent over two years in Ephesus with occasional visits to Greece and Macedonia, deciding eventually to carry up to Jerusalem a sum of money contributed by the Gentile Churches as a token of fellowship and good will for the poor of Jerusalem before he should go further west to Rome and to Spain. But on his arrival in Jerusalem his enemies managed to secure his arrest. For two years he was kept in confinement in Caesarea, and then on his appeal to Caesar he was sent as a prisoner to Rome, where for another two years he was allowed to live under watch in his own hired house, and to preach unhindered. Whether he was acquitted at his first trial and able to carry out his desire to visit Spain or return to the east, or whether he was condemned to death at once, we do not know: but tradition is definite that eventually Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome.

Wherever Paul travelled he made it his custom to go to the Jewish community first, preaching in their synagogues that Jesus is the Christ, and that God has already visited His people in sending to them the Anointed One, His Son. Rejected by the Jews, he returned to the Gentiles; he made converts in every city, founded Churches, and appointed elders to superintend the work of the Church and continue

the teaching and preaching. And in order to keep in touch with these communities in between his visits to them he wrote his letters.

2. *The Epistles of Paul.*—It seems likely that we have nearly all of Paul's correspondence, except for parts of certain letters to the Church at Corinth. There is hardly any quotation or reference to his writings in the Church Fathers that cannot be traced to one of his letters still extant. They were all addressed to definite places or people primarily to meet a local need at a particular time. Paul surely had no thought of writing 'scripture' nor did he anticipate publication, though sometimes (notably in the case of the letter to the Ephesians and that to the Romans) it was intended that they would be read by more than one community. Hence the more that we know of the circumstances of their composition and especially of the recipients, the better for our understanding of them. But, like all the New Testament writings, where such investigation is impossible or exceedingly limited, the letters still have a message for us because they deal with the eternal verities.

The purpose of which the letters were intended involved the creation of a new type of literature. Letters of course had been written before, and some too had been published. Cicero's letters to his friend Atticus show that personal letters can be written with an eye also to publication; and how common was the habit of letter-writing between friends during the first century is shown by the discovery of a large number of such intimate correspondence among the papyri of Egypt. Again in II Maccabees, in the prophet Jeremiah and elsewhere are letters that are homilies, the forerunners of 'Pastoral letters' of later days. Philosophers had found that a good way of propagating their views was to circulate them among the public by the use of open letters. Paul's letters combine the characteristics of all these,—the intimate talk of friends, the exhortation of the pastor, and the doctrinal exposition of the theologian.

It is not likely that Paul wrote these letters with his own hand,—sometimes indeed the name of the scribe or 'amanuensis' is given, as in Rom. 16:22—but he usually added some signature of his own (I Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18)—perhaps a little awkwardly? (Gal. 6:11). It would be in accordance with his nature to dictate at a speed most trying

for the writer, so that grammar and construction are often lost sight of. He used the ordinary popular Greek of his day, making frequent use of common epistolary phrases, but was always ready in case of need to coin a word of his own, particularly superlatives and a combination of compounds to bring out shades of meaning, or to fill old words with new significance, such as the word 'Grace'. He begins with a greeting which has in it a suggestion of the normal Greek and Hebrew salutation,—'grace and peace': as so often found in the papyrus-letters he next finds some reason for thanksgiving to God: he 'then discusses the special subjects that he has in mind in relation to the local conditions of the recipients and in doing so introduces a considerable amount of theology as it were incidentally, because of his habit of basing any judgement that has to be made on some central fact in the experience or teaching of Christ; and finally proceeds to his ethical instruction and exhortation, closing usually with personal greetings. We will now glance at the letters severally.

(a) The two letters to the Thessalonians were the first to be written,—unless we should give this position as some scholars do to Galatians. Having heard disquieting news about the converts he writes to remind them of the divine origin of the Gospel that he had preached to them, how that it had come not from men but from God, and of the nature of the preacher: and he exhorts them especially to a sober way of life in view of the excitement that had been aroused in them by the thought of the Second Coming. Certain points in this letter were apparently misunderstood and the excitement became greater than ever, with the result that the second letter was written to correct the misapprehension.

(b) The letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians and the Romans form a second group. The letters to Corinth, of which there were probably not less than four originally, were written at Ephesus during Paul's long stay there in his third missionary journey, and they deal primarily with problems connected with the church. To these we shall return presently.

In the letter to the Galatians he pleads for the adequacy of the simple gospel of faith in Jesus Christ, over against the view of those 'Judaisers' who wished to insist on the

Gentiles conforming first to the external rites of the law of Moses, and especially to circumcision, before they could as it were qualify themselves for admission to the Church. It has been debated at great length whether this letter was addressed to the Churches of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in south Galatia, founded by Paul on his first journey, or to unknown churches in north Galatia where he may have gone on his second journey: also whether it was written at a date not far removed from 'Romans' with which it has a number of points in common, or whether it preceded the Jerusalem Council (to whose decree no appeal is made) and so is to be regarded as first of all the letters.

The letter to the Church in Rome was sent from Corinth during Paul's third journey as a preparation for his own coming to the imperial city. It is the most elaborate of all the epistles. In the first 8 chapters he sets forth the essential facts of the Gospel that he preaches: after a terrible description of the sins of the world, Gentile and Jewish, he shows the inadequacy of both the law of Moses and the conscience of the Gentiles to bring about the right kind of relationship between God and man,—some other way of righteousness is required: this other way is provided by God in the gift of His Son Jesus, by faith in Whom we may die to sin, be buried with Him through baptism into death, and rise again to newness of life: and the section closes with his description of the new life in Christ. The second section, ch. 9-11 deals with the special problem of the rejection of the Jews; and in the third, 12-16 he turns as usual to practical exhortation based on his foregoing argument.

(c) The four 'letters of the Imprisonment',—Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians,—have generally been supposed to have been written from Rome, though in recent years many scholars have thought that one or all of them may have been written during Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, or perhaps even more likely at an earlier date when he was a prisoner in Ephesus, of which there is no direct but much circumstantial evidence. Philippians is the most intimate and affectionate of all Paul's letters, full of the notes of fellowship, joy and peace even in the midst of suffering, and of gratitude for their gracious remembrance of him in his need. Colossians was written to a Church in Asia Minor that Paul had not personally visited. There was

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a dangerous tendency for the Christian converts there to keep up many of their old pagan customs, forms of worship and other religious rites, in order to 'be on the safe side', in case after all their old gods did matter. Accordingly the emphasis in this letter is on the Person of Christ Who is set before us as supreme in all this vast universe, than Whom no other mediator is necessary, Who is Himself all-sufficient for man's salvation. Ephesians, assigned by some scholars to a member of the Pauline circle at a slightly later date though by many today as throughout the centuries to Paul himself, was most likely intended to be sent not to Ephesus alone, but as a circular letter to all the Churches of Asia Minor. Here is a vision of the Church of Christ. The opening section is a doxology in thanksgiving for the eternal purpose of God, which is to sum up all things in Christ. In Him the middle-wall of partition which had for long formed so effective a barrier between the Jewish and Gentile world had already been broken down, and both had been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ and were united to one another in His Church which is the Body of Christ. Philemon on the other hand is an entirely personal letter in which Paul commands to the forgiveness, mercy and care of his friend his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had rendered great service to Paul.

(d) The remaining three letters, two addressed to Timothy and one to Titus, are spoken of together as the 'Pastoral Epistles' because they deal with Church organization, and with the duties of the 'Pastor',—Bishop, Presbyter, Deacon or whoever he may be. These letters provide another literary problem. It is very difficult to fit them into any period of his life as it is recorded in the book of Acts, nor is the difficulty solved if we assume that Paul was acquitted at his first trial and wrote these letters at a later date. Further, there is a marked difference between the style and vocabulary used in these letters as compared with the other groups, old words are given a new meaning, and we seem to be introduced to a new set of values. Yet there are also some personal sections of an exceedingly Pauline nature which have as strong a claim to authenticity as any of his writings. It has been suggested that the letters may have a Pauline basis, but have been written up by a disciple of Paul.

Taken together these letters of Paul give us much insight

into the early years of the life of the Church in many diverse cities of the Roman Empire, and are also full of most valuable material,—exhortation and reproof, teaching and witness,—springing out of the rich spiritual experience of this first and greatest missionary to the Gentiles.

B. *I Corinthians 1-4.*

As one illustration of Paul's methods and teaching we will take his First Epistle to the Corinthians in which he deals with a number of Church problems that are no less real to us in India today than they were in Greece in the Apostle's day.

I. *Introduction.*

We cannot here go into all the intricacies of the Corinthian correspondence for which reference must be made to the commentaries, but for a better understanding of the letter we do need to know something about the city and the church to which Paul was writing, and the circumstances that called forth the letter.

(a) Paul's Corinth had been founded by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. on the site of the earlier city that had been destroyed just one hundred years before. It soon rose to prominence and became the capital of the Roman Province of Achaia. Situated on the isthmus it had two harbours, Cenchreae nine miles to the east opening on to the Aegean Sea, and Lechaeum only a mile and a half to the west from which ships sailed to Italy. It was therefore an important trading centre with a cosmopolitan population, and possessing also many of the worst features of a flourishing sea-port town. The licentiousness of the city was so well-known that a verb was formed from the city's name to represent a dissolute way of life. The worship of the people was directed in the main to the goddess Aphrodite, goddess of love: or to the Syrian goddess Ashtarfe whose temple alone possessed a thousand prostitutes. On the other hand it was also a University centre, and with the re-birth of the city the Isthmian Games famed in earlier days had been revived. During part of the time that Paul was in the city the Governor was Gallio, brother of the philosopher Seneca.

(b) *The Church.*—Paul arrived at Corinth on his second missionary journey, lonely and disconsolate after his experience at Athens (Acts 18). Repulsed, as so often, by the Jews he had given himself largely to work among the Gentiles, and in the course of a year and a half during which he had been living with Priscilla and Aquila, tent-makers like himself, he had gathered a number of converts both Greek and Jew into the Christian Church. This new community however reflected many of the city's characteristics, a floating population coming from many countries with diverse backgrounds ; and it was by no means easy for the converts to throw off their old manner of life and thought at once especially while they were surrendered by the familiar degrading environment.

(c) *The Letter.*—When Paul was residing at Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 19 ; I Cor. 16. 9ff.) he received two pieces of information regarding the Church at Corinth. An official letter was brought by Stephanus. Fortunatus and Achaicus, in which answers were requested to a number of questions. These are dealt with in sections beginning 'Now concerning',—celibacy (7:1), meat offered to idols (8:1), spiritual gifts (12:1), and the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (16:1). But 'members of Chloe's household' (1:11) had also reported grave disorders in the Church,—party faction (1-4), immorality condoned (5:1), Christians going to law with each other in pagan law-courts (6:1), women's unseemly behaviour in Church (11:1), greed shown at the Love. Feast (11:20), and denial of the resurrection (15:12). This letter deals, therefore, entirely with these problems, some ecclesiastical, some moral and one (ch. 15) theological. For slightly fuller treatment we will look very briefly at the first question.

2. *I Cor. 1-4. Faction in the Church.*

After his customary thanksgiving,—and we note that it is for the 'gifts' of the Corinthian Christians, no mention being made of any 'graces' in which the letter suggests they were sadly lacking,—Paul launches out at once into one of the most difficult problems with which he was faced, that of disputes among the Church members. It appears that four parties had developed, probably not on theological grounds but rather through such personal attachments as

were so common in Greece's City States, though doctrinal questions may also have played their part. 'I belong to Paul's party' said one, Paul the first preacher of the Gospel and, under God, the founder of the Church at Corinth. 'I am of Apollos', said another; Apollos was an 'eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures' (Acts 18:34) and may have presented the Gospel in a more popular way. 'I of Cephas' (or Peter); this partisan may have been a trader from Palestine, jealous of Peter's pre-eminence, or a stricter Jew preferring Peter's more conservative position. Others said 'I am of Christ' either claiming to have seen or heard the Lord Himself, or being unwilling to identify themselves with any of the other groups and so unavoidably forming another party.

Paul at once puts before them the main issue, and raises as always the question to that spiritual level where alone such matters can be decided; he asks 'Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you?' and he follows it up with two main lines of thought.

1:17-2:16. The Gospel message and *how* it should be received. What matters is not the wisdom with which the Gospel is presented or understood, but the spirit in which it is given and received. There is no need to fight with one another over any preacher's interpretation of the Gospel, or to compare and contrast it with that of another preacher, for it is not the monopoly of the wise and prudent, but can be received by babes in understanding. It is the Gospel itself that is all important.—'We preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God'. None can understand it all; all may understand something of it. So there is no room for any to boast, save in the Lord. No man merely by human understanding can receive the Gospel of Christ, for though simple enough for babes, it remains a mystery. But 'unto us God revealed it through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God'; and presently the Apostle adds with conviction 'We have the mind of Christ' (2:16).

3:1—4:21. Christian Ministers and how they should be regarded. Paul passes on to consider in what way Christian preachers and teachers should be regarded: 'What then is

Apollos? and what is Paul? Ministers through whom ye believed ; and each as the Lord gave to him. I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase' and throughout the emphasis rests upon God, and upon what God has wrought. The 'Minister' is indeed one who ministers, a servant: like one of many at work in the fields, or one of many engaged on a building (3:6-15). These Corinthian Christians, he says in ch. 4, whom Paul and Apollos alike served, may indeed feel themselves to be full, and rich even as kings ; but the ministers are fools for Christ's sake, suffering persecution all the day long (4:8-13). Certainly then these men-leaders are no reason for boasting except it may be as a possession. And all possessions are God's gifts ; as such 'all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come ; all are yours ; and ye are Christ's ; and Christ is God's' (3:21-22).

CHAPTER VI

THE FINALITY OF CHRIST

'God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds ; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.' Such is the theme of the 'Epistle to the Hebrews', in which as we read we shall meet often with the thought of the Old and the New Covenant ; of the fulfilment of the promises of old ; of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ as being necessary to the New Covenant ; of His subsequent exaltation ; and of the need for repentance: the whole approached from quite a new angle, so that the similarity of the message of this letter in all essentials with the other writings we have already considered is the more striking.

A. The Epistle to the Hebrews.

1. Its position in the Canon: It will be recalled that this is one of the books that had a struggle for recognition, and for a long time was one of the 'disputed' books. It was accepted by the Church in the East from earliest times on the assumption that it was written by the apostle Paul. In the West it was for many years rejected although it was known in Rome at latest by A.D. 95 when Clement, Bishop of Rome, referred to it. It is not found in Marcion's list of authoritative books, nor does the Muratorian* canon mention it. Tertullian is the only early representative of the Church in Africa to refer to it. It was the authority of Jerome and Augustine at about the end of the fourth century, influenced by the practice of the East, that eventually secured for his letter a place in the Canon.

2. The date of the composition can be gauged tolerably accurately. It was already known by A.D. 95. On the other hand the author was evidently familiar with some of the letters of Paul; and the first generation of Christians had already passed away (2:3; 13:7). Some have laid stress on the fact that there is no mention of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; but there does not seem to be any special significance in that, for it is of importance to notice that throughout the argument the writer is not concerned with the Judaism current in his own day, with its emphasis upon the Temple, the law and circumcision, all of which are prominent in the letters of Paul, but with the older religion of the Children of Israel, the tabernacle and its sacrificial ceremonies. A date between A.D. 65 and 85 therefore seems indicated, more probably about A.D. 80.

3. With regard to the authorship of the letter there is no early tradition from the West, where it was composed. Our English versions give as the title 'The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, and this was the general belief of the early Eastern Church. The author was a friend of Timothy (13:23) and there are a few verbal resemblances between this writing and Paul's letters but in other respects

* A Latin mutilated document of the second or third century, apparently giving a list of the New Testament books and comments on them; named after the Librarian Muratori who discovered it in the library of Milan, and published it in 1742.

all the internal evidence is against Pauline authorship. In form it is a treatise rather than a letter, having no epistolary introduction at all. In style it contains careful, sustained sentences in contrast with the broken, spontaneous utterances of the Pauline letters, while the author pursues his argument in a strict, orderly manner refusing to be diverted by other thoughts coming into his mind except for purposes of exhortation. In quoting from the Old Testament he uses Codex Alexandrinus of the Greek Bible, whereas Paul uses Codex Vaticanus if he does not translate direct from the Hebrew. But above all, the standpoint is different. For Paul Judaism is the preparation through the law for the Gospel: in Hebrews Christianity is the New Covenant, the substance and reality of the Old Covenant which was but the shadow and symbol.

Three other names are mentioned in early tradition with reference to authorship. Clement of Alexandria suggested that S. Luke had translated into Greek a Hebrew composition of Paul: but the basis is not Pauline, and the work is not a translation. Origen records a tradition, accepted in later days by Erasmus, that Clement of Rome was the author; but there is no evidence for this, and a comparison of Hebrews with the known Epistle makes it highly improbable. Tertullian assigned the letter to Barnabas, companion of Paul, a Levite, and a native of Cyprus which was in touch with Alexandrian thought such as has obviously influenced the writer. Inaccuracies regarding the tabernacle ritual would be surprising in such an author, but in any case the author surely belongs to a later generation of Christians than Barnabas.

Of the many suggestions that have been made in later ages two may be mentioned. Luther proposed the name of Apollos, a friend of Paul, eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, and an Alexandrian Jew. If he were the author it is surprising that no tradition of his name has survived, and that in referring to the letter Clement of Rome should not have referred to the author as well since Apollos was well known in Corinth to which Church Clement was writing. The difficulty regarding the silence of tradition is avoided in Harnack's suggestion that it was a woman, Priscilla, who wrote it, and prejudice was sufficiently strong for the concealment of the name or for allowing it to pass into oblivion. She is generally mentioned before her husband,

was associated with Paul, and also with Alexandria. But in the end all these names are so many conjectures, and we have to admit that we are dealing with an anonymous composition.

4. From a study of the text we can glean a certain amount of information about the recipients of the letter. It was certainly not intended for 'Hebrews' in general: but for a small group of people in one definite place (5:12; 6:9); they had passed through bitter persecution and had on the whole remained steadfast (10:32ff.), but had not yet laid down their lives (12:4); some were in danger of wavering and of falling away into unbelief (3:12; 4:1; 6:4; 10:26ff.) but there is no indication of the particular temptation that threatened them; of current Judaism, as we have seen, there is hardly a word, and it may have been simply one of the many pagan cults of the day that attracted them, largely to escape the persecution that was likely to increase if they clung to their Christian faith. No distinction is drawn between Jew and Gentile, and the group may have been a mixed community of Christians, since the Old Testament was as authoritative for the Gentile as for the Jewish Christian.

5. The purpose of the author is best seen by a brief survey of the contents. It is the most methodical and well-ordered of all the New Testament books, and contains from the literary standpoint some of the best Greek. There is no greeting from writer to readers such as we find in the other letters, and while there is a slight personal note at the close it is hardly sufficient to justify the word Epistle in the title: it reads more like a treatise, the argument of which is broken only for words of exhortation which occur in each main section. This is how the argument develops:—

- 1 : 1-3 The Theme. The final and perfect revelation of God in His Divine Son.
- 1 : 4-2 : 18 Christ, the Son, as Mediator: superior to the Angels. ('How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?')
- 3-4 Christ, the Son, as Apostle: superior to Moses. ('Harden not your hearts.')
- 5-7 Christ, as High-Priest, superior to Aaron: a comparison with Melchizedek, King of Righteousness and King of Peace. ('Press on unto perfection.')

- 8-10 Christ, the Sacrifice, superior to Old Testament sacrifices, and the heavenly temple superior to the temple in Jerusalem. ('Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith.')
- 11 The Heroes of Faith.
- 12-13 A call to holy living: and Epilogue.

The recipients of the letter were not finding life at all easy. Ch. 10:32ff. shows that, when first converted, their initial enthusiasm and experience of Christian grace had strengthened them to endure 'a great conflict of suffering', mockery, social boycott and the like; but now they were growing weary, and asking whether it was all worth while; was their aloofness from others a right result of their loyalty to Christ? was He in Himself sufficient for all their needs? was He so distinct from all others? or was He but one of several? As we read we are reminded of the temptations of the converts at Colossae, and the modern attitude of mind that can regard all religions as much alike. To all such questionings this treatise is a magnificent reply. It is not a study of comparative religions, but of one only. Men were attempting to satisfy the cravings of their souls by Stoic philosophy which was too stern and harsh for the majority, or by Epicureanism which was of too light a mould; or by one of the Mystery religions which came from the speculations of men's minds. There was only one real monotheistic faith worth the name of religion,—Judaism, and the author goes back to the earlier days of that great religion to bring out its essential characteristics. In comparison and contrast with the best that even the highest religion had to offer Christ is the Final and Complete Revelation: the Eternal, instead of the transient: the Real, and not the mere shadow. The writer is not looking for or offering any easy way of life, but his purpose is to meet the much profounder and the universal need of men,—the salvation of their souls. Central to his argument are chapters 9 and 10 which we will consider in slightly greater detail.

B. *Hebrews 9-10. The All-Sufficient Sacrifice of Christ.*

As Christ is superior to angels as a revelation of God; to Moses, as an Apostle; to Aaron as High-Priest; so also is He superior to all the offerings and sacrifices of the Old

Testament ritual, and the author proceeds to demonstrate his point along the following lines:—

- 9:1-5 He begins with a description of the Tabernacle and the furniture that it contained. He makes no special use of it in his argument, but includes it partly perhaps for vividness, and partly to lay stress on its temporal and material nature. It suggests indeed a somewhat academic interest in these matters, and the description might be better suited to Gentile students of the Old Testament scriptures than to Jews by whom the tabernacle would at least be regarded as a precious inheritance.
- 6-10 The ritual on the Day of Atonement. Attention is drawn to the fact that only the High-Priest may venture into the Holy of Holies, and that too on only one day in the year; further, the offering made is only for the 'errors' of himself and of the people. The Revised version margin 'ignorances' is better than 'errors', for the reference is to unintentional sins committed in ignorance with which alone the Old Testament sacrificial system could deal. Singers found guilty of committing sin 'with a high hand' (intentionally) were cut off from the congregation. Such a sacrifice therefore was incapable of producing the perfect worshipper, such as this epistle seeks.
- 11-22 The Sacrifice of Christ. In verse 12, we note the words 'his own blood', 'once for all', and 'eternal redemption' in contrast with the blood of an animal under the Old Covenant, the annual ceremony, and its partial and temporary efficacy. In verse 14 'the eternal Spirit' of the Revised Version suggests the Holy Spirit, in which case the meaning would be 'in co-operation with the will of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit'. A more natural rendering would be 'through eternal spirit' emphasizing the unbroken unity of life of the Eternal Son of God, who made this offering in the spiritual realm so that it could be efficacious in the spiritual life of men. The offering again is a voluntary act on the part of the Victim Who is without blemish morally as the sacrificial victim under the Old Covenant must be without blemish physically.

Then follows emphasis on the necessity of death for the remission of sins, but verses 15 to 18 are complicated by the fact that the writer freely uses the same Greek word in its two quite distinct senses. The word '*diathēkē*' means 'covenant' or 'agreement' and it also means a 'last will and testament'. The regular word in Hebrew for 'making a covenant'

means literally to 'cut' a covenant, because of the common custom amongst the early Semites of ratifying their covenants by the sacrifice of an animal. It is not accurate, however to say that no covenant was valid among the Israelites that was not accompanied by the shedding of blood: we have, for example, the covenant entered into between Jonathan and David in I Sam. 18:3. On the other hand, it is clear enough that no last will and testimony can take effect until a death,—the death of the testator,—has taken place. So by a mingling of the two usages of the word it is seen that for the ratification of the '*diathēkē*' a death must occur: and that is true also of this New Covenant between God and man in Christ.

In verse 19 the writer passes away from the ritual of the Day of Atonement and introduces elements that occur elsewhere in the Levitical system, e.g. the law for the cleansing of the leper in Lev. 14:4f. whether because he was trusting to memory, or whether he regarded the sacrificial system as a single whole.

- 23-28 Through this Sacrifice Christ entered not into a holy place like the Holy of Holies, but into the very Presence of God. Like man He could die and needed to die but once, the perfect Sacrifice, and as men pass through death to judgement, so Christ after His death shall come again for their salvation.
- 10:1-4 The inadequacy of the Old Testament sacrifices is again urged. Why do the worshippers not know that they are perfect when the offering has been made? Why this constant repetition of sacrifices? Why, but that they bring to mind the very sins that no animal's blood can ever take away.
- 5-10 How different is the nature of true sacrifice! Perfect obedience to the holy Will of God,—that is the offering that Christ made when He came.
- 11-18 A final contrast drawn between the two types of sacrifice. Under the Old Covenant there was constant repetition of the offering, and the priest remains standing showing that his work is never completed: but under the New Covenant there is the One Sacrifice, once offered, and Christ, the High-Priest and the Victim, is set down at the right hand of God, His work completed. And all this is in accordance with the promise of God, made through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah.
- 19-39 An exhortation to enter boldly into the Holy Place, into the very Presence of God; to offer to Him spiritual worship and to live lives of holiness.

There is much here that is remote from our normal way of thinking, though indeed the prevalence of animal sacrifice which we see round about us in India should make it less strange than it sounds to Western ears. But once enter the realm of sacrificial ideas, and could the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants be more forcibly brought out, or the finality of the One, Perfect and Sufficient Sacrifice of Christ be more clearly presented?

Once again we hear, though in such different tones, the triumphant note of the Early Church, and their conviction that the supreme event in human history has already taken place; the new era has already begun. We are no longer, like the Israelite worshippers of old, left outside the veil. In place of the veil is the body of Christ, and through Him we too, our sins forgiven, enter into the Presence of God. Is the Christian faith worth while after all? *are* all religions alike?

'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having a great priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our body washed with pure water: let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised: and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.' (Heb. 10:19-25.)

CHAPTER VII

MAINTAINING THE FAITH IN TIMES OF LAWLESSNESS AND PERSECUTION

The theme of this chapter is drawn from two of the New Testament letters which belong to a group of seven that are known as the 'Catholic Epistles', and we will glance briefly at the group before turning to the text of Jude and II Peter.

A. *The Catholic Epistles.*

The seven letters included under this heading are the Epistles of James, of Peter (2), of John (3) and of Jude. There is considerable uncertainty regarding the date and authorship of each of these letters, and it will be remembered that no less than five of them hovered for a long time on the border-line between the 'canonical' and the 'extra-canonical' books. But we must first ask what was the unifying factor that bound them into one group, for they differ widely from one another.

(a) '*Catholic*'.—The word occurs first in the writings of Origen (A.D. 165-255) with reference to the Epistles of Peter, while Eusebius towards the beginning and Jerome towards the end of the fourth century apply it to the seven, though Jerome seems to prefer to use 'canonical' which was the title in common use in the West from the seventh century. There has been much discussion about the meaning of the word 'catholic' in this connection. There is no evidence for or likelihood in two suggestions that have been made,—that these letters were contained in a common collection of Apostolic writings (otherwise unknown); or that the letters contain sound catholic doctrine as contrasted with books of heretical teaching. The most natural meaning of the word is 'general' or 'universal', as contrasted with definite and specific, but how far is this interpretation applicable? It suits I John admirably; James, the letters of Peter, and Jude tolerably well. II and III John on the other hand are more local and definite than any other letter in the New Testament except Philemon, and must have been included in the group through their association with I John. Another suggestion is that *catholic* here means universally accepted, genuine, which may be correct just because the group contains the most disputed books that found difficulty in obtaining recognition; and this would also explain Jerome's substitution of the alternative title 'canonical'.

(b) *Epistle of James*.—The author refers to himself in 1:1 as 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ', and tradition has interpreted this to mean James the Lord's brother, the bishop of Jerusalem where he died by martyrdom in A.D. 62. This would necessitate a very early date for the letter. The composition reads like a moral tract rather than

a letter: in style it is similar to the Greek diatribes or addresses by popular preachers in which sundry questions had to be met and dealt with, and direct exhortations constantly made,—there are no less than 60 imperatives in rather over 100 verses. In thought it has obvious affinities with the prophets of the Old Testament, and still more with the Wisdom Literature. The name of Jesus Christ occurs but twice (1:1; 2:1) and while there is nothing inconsistent with Christian teaching in it neither is there much that is distinctively Christian. There are clear references to some of the sayings in the Sermon on the Mount, but no mention of the ministry of our Lord, or of His death and resurrection. Most surprising of all, as examples of suffering and of patience we are pointed to 'the prophets who spake in the name of the Lord' and then to Job (5:10f). There is no teaching about or exhortation to Christian faith, and it is perhaps not to be wondered at that Luther characterized it as 'an epistle of straw'. In the light of the contents some have suggested that it was originally a Jewish document worked over and in part 'Christianized'; others, that some Christian teacher endeavoured to persuade his fellow-Jews of the truth by allowing the teaching of Jesus to make its own appeal by its intrinsic beauty and merit, and deliberately avoided everything specifically Christian, especially the scandal of the Cross. It was apparently known in Rome before A.D. 100, but Origen is the first to connect the name of James with it, and it was received into the Canon in the Churches of the West and of the East in the fourth and fifth centuries respectively. Perhaps a date near the end of the first century by an unknown James is as near as we can get to the truth as to its composition.

The theme of the writer is in the main the nature of true religion which is to be shown in a man's relationships with his fellows: but a variety of subjects are discussed, connected with one another only by the slenderest link—often that of a single word. He deals with the right way to meet trials and temptations; the need to be doers of the word and not hearers only; the sin and hypocrisy of showing respect to the rich man and neglect of the poor; the relation of faith and works; the special dangers besetting those who teach, and the difficulty that all men have in governing the tongue; the impossibility of being at once friends of God and friends

of the world ; and constantly he reminds his readers of the necessity of receiving that Wisdom which is from on high.

(c) *I Peter*.—Here we have to draw a distinction between I Peter and II Peter. The first letter from very early times was accepted as authoritative and Petrine, and in spite of some serious difficulties which cannot lightly be brushed aside it is still generally so regarded today. In this case it must have been written presumably in Rome very shortly before his martyrdom. It is in the main an exhortation to Christian living in days of persecution and peril. Christians are to be loyal citizens and to confute by the excellence of their lives, even though persecuted, the unjust accusations brought against them. In like manner the relations of slaves and masters, and of wives and husbands is dealt with. There is frequent reference to the sufferings of Christ, and to His victory ; and the spirit that is taught is not that of passive resignation, but rather of rejoicing in the privilege of being in some measure partakers in the sufferings of Christ, Whose glory they will also share.

(d) *John*.—The three Johannine letters are probably by one and the same author ; no name is given in the text ; the first is by an 'eye-witness', the second and third being by 'the Elder'. I John, like I Peter, was received as authoritative from a very early date. It has hardly any of the customary signs of a letter, and reads more like a homily. Some have considered that it was written as a covering letter to accompany the fourth Gospel, though others believe that different authorship is indicated. The writer's purpose is 'that ye may have fellowship with us' (1:3), 'that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God'. He combats the errors of incipient Gnosticism by insisting on the reality of the Incarnation of our Lord, that He did indeed come in the flesh ; and he explains the new Christian way, the way of fellowship with God or of eternal life, by drawing out clear contrasts between light and darkness, love and hate, truth and error, life and death, laying special emphasis throughout on Love, primarily the love that God has for us, but therefore also the necessity of our love for God and our love for the brethren.

II and III John are less well attested and rarely quoted by Church Fathers, but that is probably due to their subject-

matter which scarcely lends itself to quotation. Both are written by the Elder. II John is the warning given (probably not to an individual 'lady' but to a Church) against the Docetists who denied that 'Christ had come in the flesh'. III John is a personal letter to a certain Gaius, a member of a Church of which one Diotrephes was proving himself an interfering busy-body refusing hospitality to itinerant preachers whom the author now commends to Gaius.

(e) *Jude, or 'Judas, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James'*.—In this case also the traditional interpretation is that it is the Lord's brother that is referred to (cp. Mk. 6:3); if so the letter must have been written probably between A.D. 70 and 80. This was widely accepted in early days,—considering its brevity and nature it is comparatively well attested,—and is so still today by some scholars; but the difficulties to it are serious. Thus the phrase in verse 17 'the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ' sounds strange if it comes from a brother of the Lord; while 'the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints' in verse 3 surely suggests that the writer belonged to an age later than that of the first disciples who received the word. The false doctrine that is attacked was certainly current in the second century, though there is no evidence of it at an earlier date. The frequent use of Apocryphal Literature, which has a parallel only in the Epistle of Barnabas excluded from the Canon, also tells against the traditional authorship. Hence many scholars assign the book to a date early in the second century and to some otherwise unknown Jude.

(f) *II Peter* is universally regarded as the latest book in the New Testament.—It was not translated into the early Syriac or Latin versions made towards the close of the second century: nor does it find any mention until the time of Origen. Eusebius places it in the list of 'disputed' books. We may note the following features about it. It is quite unlike I Peter in thought, subject-matter and style; for example whereas this letter quotes from the Old Testament five times only, there are no less than thirty-one citations in I Peter. It incorporates practically the whole of Jude, with only verbal changes. The personal references it contains are artificial, and such that anyone familiar with the Gospel

story could have written: " (1:14, 16). The genuineness of this letter is emphasized in an unnatural, not to say a suspicious manner (3:1). The first generation of Christians are passed away (3:4-8). The letters of Paul are spoken of as 'scriptures' (3:15f.) All the internal evidence then points to a date somewhere between A.D. 120 and 150. It was written by someone familiar with the first epistle of Peter and with the letters of Paul, who wrote up perhaps for Greek speaking Christians in Asia Minor the letter of Jude which had been intended for Palestine. It thus belongs to a large body of literature, part of which is still extant, under the name of Peter,—the Gospel, the Preaching, the Apocalypse, the Judgement of Peter and so forth.

B. *Jude and II Peter.*

i. *Their general message.*

These books, apart from the religious message they give, have their value in showing us something of the change that was taking place in what is called the 'sub-apostolic' period, shortly after the death of the apostles. There was never any 'age of innocence' or of perfection in the early Church, as can be seen by an unbiased reading of the book of Acts, and still more of the Epistles of Paul. But those days were nevertheless undoubtedly marked by a great outpouring of the Spirit, resulting in an evangelistic fervour and a true denial of self such as has rarely since been seen on any large scale. Such times were past history when these two letters were written.

(a) In conduct there is prevalent a spirit of antinomianism,—a rebellion against the restraints of law and all form of discipline. This had been a frequent danger in the Church ever since the time when Paul had grasped for himself and taught others the wonder of the grace of God, and the implications of the Gospel for Christian liberty. He had himself been accused of encouraging or at least of allowing licence and anarchy. When the grace of God is strongly emphasized,—as it must be,—and a corresponding recognition of man's frailty and helplessness, it is possible for the perverted mind to excuse man's sin on the ground of his powerlessness to do anything else, and to lay the responsibility for it upon God

for His failure to provide the necessary grace. Similarly Paul's teaching about Christian liberty, by which he meant freedom from the bondage to self so that complete obedience to the holy Will of God now becomes possible, freedom from the irksomeness of the Law that laid emphasis on obligation and duty because now the motive power was God's infinite love for man and man's love to God in response, this teaching had been misinterpreted as though to 'be not under law but under grace' meant freedom for each man to do what he liked since for any sin committed there was forgiveness assured. Such perversion of Christian teaching began to gain ground as the thrill and enthusiasm of the early days of the Church's life faded into the background and by the second century the Church was seriously affected by it.

(b) In thought a parallel change had been taking place, as is shown by the use in these two epistles of apocryphal works, especially the book of Enoch. We have noted in an earlier chapter the dignified restraint and sobriety of our New Testament, especially of the Gospels, describing though they were the most thrilling and amazing events in history. In the apocryphal literature on the other hand we may read a host of stories, especially about the boyhood of Jesus, of a miraculous nature,—legends such as are wont to gather around famous personalities. Such embellishments to the Gospel story, together with speculative interpretations and additions to the Old Testament narratives were demanded by the second and third generations of Christians, and an illustration of this tendency is to be found in each of our letters.—'For as God spared not angels when they sinned, but cast them down to hell, and committed them to pits of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement . . .' (II Pet. 2:4) which has grown out of the brief reference in Gen. 6. 'But Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing judgement, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.' 'And to these also Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came with ten thousands of his holy ones, to execute judgement upon all . . .' (Jude 9 and 14) both passages being based upon the book of Enoch.

(c) In spirit there is evidence of a much greater bitterness towards persecutors and of the consciousness of an unsympathetic world. There had been persecution from the

earliest days, but those who arrested Peter and John were compelled to 'take knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus' (Acts 4:13) and later 'they departed from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name' (Acts 5:41). Paul and Silas, wrongfully arrested at Philippi 'about midnight were praying and singing hymns unto God',—and their jailor was converted with all his house. But those days too were passed, and there was a growing tendency among the Christians to complain against the persecution from which they suffered, and against the delay in the Lord's Coming.

2. *Special message of these letters.*

(a) Jude: The reason for this letter is supplied in verses 4 and 18—

'For there are certain men crept in privily, even they who were of old set forth unto this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ': 'In the last day there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts . . . having not the Spirit'. In other words the Church was being attacked by heresy and its accompanying immorality. In between these verses we have God's righteous judgement on all who have opposed Him, as illustrated by the Old Testament stories,—Sodom and Gomorrah, Cain, Korah,—and by apocryphal legend. There is, the writer insists, an eternal distinction between right and wrong, which no true teaching about the grace of God can ever obliterate, and no Christian liberty can transcend. What then are the readers to do? The answer is given in verses 20-23.

'But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.'

'Faith' in this passage is clearly not used in the sense that is most common in Paul's letters, but neither does it quite mean 'creed' as in later days. It rather signifies the object of their faith, Jesus Christ; much as Paul in I Cor. 3:10f. speaks of Jesus Christ as the foundation on which the building is erected.

We note also in these verses one of the rare occasions when all three Persons of the Trinity are mentioned in succession. There is no doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament, for the writers were not attempting to construct a Theology, but were endeavouring to describe in adequate language the experiences through which they were passing. We have therefore the seed out of which the later doctrine grew.

The author, then, like all his fellow-writers in the New Testament, exhorts his readers to do their part in striving for their own salvation and for the salvation of others, but that if doing so they must in the end and most of all rely upon the love of God and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(b) II Peter 3:1-13.

This passage from II Peter may be taken as typical of the letter. There is first the excitement and uncertainty caused by the expectation and the delay in the Second Coming. All the New Testament writings bear testimony to the important part that this expectation played in the life of the Church, and how the emphasis upon it and the interpretation of it varied in different districts and at different periods. There is, for example, a more vivid expectation and a more literal acceptance of some of the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew than in the other Gospels. When Paul wrote his first letters, addressed to the Church of Thessalonica, he clearly looked for the Parousia within his own lifetime, though the purpose of the second letter in particular is to urge his readers meanwhile to carry on their daily activities in soberness: but when he wrote to the Philippians he no longer thought that he would be alive when the Lord returned. In the fourth Gospel while room is still left for the literal fulfilment of the Parousia the author himself inclines to the belief that it has already in large measure taken place in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Now once again in the second century, probably, owing to the difficult times through which they were passing, Christians were eagerly anticipating the speedy appearing of the Lord, and the author exhorts them to patience. He shares in the general expectation which he expresses in verse 10 in typical apocalyptic language of which more will be said in the next chapter on the Book of Revelation. But he adopts the same attitude towards the present unrest as did Paul before him. If such is indeed their hope there is the greater need for them to prepare themselves for the great event by the right conduct of their lives at the present time,—'what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God?' In their relationships one with another and in their obedience to the will of God and their sincere worship of Him they should live lives worthy of the great day, for 'according to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.'

In reading these letters we cannot but be conscious that the Church in the second century had failed somewhat to maintain the high levels of Christian thought and action that were characteristic of the Apostolic Age. But circumstances change from age to age, and at times of world-upheaval such as the present it should be easier for us to enter with sympathy and understanding into the thoughts and even the vocabulary

of these writers than is possible during days in peaceful progress. What is important to notice is that, whatever the world-circumstances may be, the message of the Gospel remains essentially the same, and the response to that message that is called for is one of faith in the Eternal God and of lives ordered in accordance with that faith. We may fittingly close this chapter with one of the great Doxologies of the New Testament, which in itself makes the Epistle of Jude a precious possession—

'Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now, and for evermore. Amen.'

CHAPTER VIII

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND OF HIS CHRIST

The Book of Revelation which is our study in this final chapter was for centuries regarded as unique, unlike any other book that had been composed ; but about two hundred years ago a large quantity of very similar writings was discovered to which has been given the name of

A. *Apocalyptic Literature.*

'Apocalypse' is from a Greek word which is the equivalent of the Latin word 'revelatio', meaning an unveiling, uncovering, revelation.

i. *Scope of the Literature.*—There are a few apocalyptic sections in the Old Testament, sometimes consisting of only a verse or two but sometimes of a longer passage, as in Is. 24-27; Joel 4; and especially the book of Daniel, particularly chapters 7-12. Similarly in the New Testament there are passages of a like nature,—in II Thess. 2:1-12; Jude and II Peter; and, best known of all, our Lord's answer to His disciples concerning future days as found in Mk. 13 (Mat. 24, and Lk. 21) to which has been given the title 'the little apocalypse'. But in the eighteenth century

these were discovered to be but fragments of a large literature that was produced between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, in which the more important works now extant are:—

- (i) Book of Enoch, which was not far from securing a place in the Old Testament Canon. It deals with the fall of the angels (Gen. 6) and with Enoch's visits to them on earth and in hell.
- (ii) Assumption of Moses; in which Moses relates to Joshua the history of Israel down to the birth of Christ, and then predicts the Kingdom of God.
- (iii) Assumption of Baruch, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem in 70.
- (iv) IV Esdras (in the English 'Apocrypha'), containing seven visions of Ezra in Babylon, and discussing the problem of evil and of suffering in view of the triumph of pagan Rome over Jerusalem.

2. Comparison with Prophetic Literature.—In some measure the apocalyptic writers were the spiritual successors of the Prophets of earlier days, for both prophet and apocalyptic set out to reveal God and His ways; but there are also some marked differences between them due in part to changes in thought, and in part to external circumstances.

Thus, the prophet speaks direct to the people, and so identifies himself with Him that sent him that he frequently says—'Thus saith the Lord';—an orator and a preacher in the first place, whose words were recorded somewhat later. The apocalyptic on the other hand writes in solitude of the things that he has seen in his vision of God, or on which he has meditated from older writings.

Again, the prophets speak of the will of God for their day and generation and of the sin of man, and challenge the nation to repentance and obedience to God; so may a new era be introduced here and now into the chosen land. The apocalypses have been called 'tracts for bad times'. Their authors see no hope in the existing order of things, or in any human effort to change them; God Himself must intervene. Their exhortation is to endurance under suffering, to loyalty to God in the midst of persecution, to a patient waiting for God to act, and to hope in the future after and beyond some great crisis that is yet to be. The woe of the present is but part of a universal conflict in heaven and upon earth; but God reigns supreme over all; therefore ultimate victory is assured, however dark the day may seem. This change in

outlook was doubtless partly due to the change in political circumstances. When the prophets spoke the nation, while not truly independent, nevertheless liked to regard itself as free with its own king or governor: but in the later days it had become but an insignificant unit in all-absorbing world-powers,—of Alexander and of his successors in Antioch and Egypt, and then of Rome.

Another important difference is in their thought about God. The nearness of God, in prophetic thought, is seen in their phrase 'Thus saith the Lord'. His dwelling place was in the Temple: He was Yahweh Sabaoth, Lord of Hosts, Who was in truth the Leader of the nation whether in peace or in war. But when the apocalypticists wrote God was further removed from them: it was His transcendence that dominated their thought, and consequently other beings such as angels had to be introduced as intermediaries to bridge the gulf between God and man. It is interesting to note that in the Christian apocalypse in our New Testament the transcendence and immanence of God are at last brought together.

3. *Some characteristic features.*—For the better understanding of what is after all a very strange form of literature we need to bear certain points in mind. In the first place it was the custom to produce these works 'pseudonymously' or under a false name, the name chosen being that of some saint or hero of the past whose authority was thereby invoked. Two factors may have contributed to this habit; the age of prophecy was regarded as closed, and as a modern voice would not therefore receive a hearing the words must be uttered through a leader of the past,—not that there was any desire for or possibility of deception by this purely literary device! but further, the days were evil, and open speech on matters that might well be interpreted from a political point of view was dangerous, and this may well have prompted the desire for anonymity on the part of the writer as well as the style of writing that was adopted. How far this common Jewish custom applies to our Christian apocalypse is an open question, for 'John' was a contemporary name, and not one that was borne by one of the Patriarchs of the race. Secondly, as this literature is pseudonymous, so is it pseudo-prophetic. The author places himself back in the age of the man whose name he has adopted and 'prophesies' the history between that period and the year in which he is actually

living; after which, basing his conclusions on past events, he predicts in less detail what the future will bring forth. Thirdly, the message is delivered not in blunt speech such as the prophets employed, but in weird and mysterious symbolism in which some objects are of very frequent occurrence,—the Tree of Life, the Book of Life; winged figures: heavenly beings in white: stars falling from heaven: horsemen wading through rivers of blood: animals which represent nations and empires, their heads and horns signifying kings: and cryptic periods to measure the length of time before the end of the world. But most important of all is the development of religious thought along certain specific lines, so that this literature provides a valuable link between the Old and the New Testaments. This applies for example to the doctrine of angels, who through the remoteness of God are increasing in importance. Even the prophet Zechariah had an angel to help him in the interpretation of his visions: in Daniel Gabriel and Michael are mentioned by name, and in Enoch we are introduced to the four Archangels, Michael, Raphael, Phanuel and Gabriel. Of the Son of man, mentioned in Daniel 7, much more is written in the Book of Enoch, where he is the Righteous One, the Elect, the Chosen One: and the term is applied to an individual rather than to a community. It was at this time also that the doctrine of Resurrection came to hold a secure place in the minds of at least a large section of the Jews, to which this literature bears testimony.

4. *The Book of Revelation.*

(a) It is not easy to determine upon the scheme of the book, and various different suggestions have been made. Some consider that there is continuous development throughout; others that there are parallel incidents, or as it were two accounts of the same scene; others again that it should be read as a drama with acts and scenes. There is a prologue to the whole book in 1:1-3; the apocalypse proper in 1:4—22:5; and a short epilogue in 22:6-21. Accepting the leading of Dr. R. H. Charles we may arrange the contents of the apocalypse in the following order: the prologue (1:4-20); the letters to the Seven Churches (2-3); then the vision of God and the Lamb; the judgements of the seals, the trumpets and the bowls, interspersed with visions of hope and victory;

the reign of Christ for one thousand years, after which comes the Last Judgement and finally the New Jerusalem. (Dr. Charles considers some dislocation of sections to have taken place, especially in the final chapters.)

(b) Different parts of the work undoubtedly had their origin at different periods, but in its final form it appears to belong to the reign of Domitian (A.D. 90-96) as chapter 17 at least clearly indicates. Ample use has been made of earlier apocalypses, both Jewish and Christian, and very likely of other foreign literature as well ; but the different elements have been brought together by a single writer possessing a literary style and rules of Greek grammar that are all his own !

(c) Purpose and Message : The Church is passing through a time of testing and persecution. It will be noticed that the conditions described in the letters to the Churches are different from those in the later chapters of the book ; in the former the danger that threatens the Church is heresy or corruption within, in the latter it is persecution from without. The Jewish apocalypses in such circumstances always concentrate attention upon a somewhat distant future when God Himself will intervene. This Christian apocalypse looks back as well as forward. The author tells of a Messiah Who has already come, Who has been slain, and is now the Lamp upon the throne. Therefore victory is the more assured, for indeed victory has already been won in heaven and the age-long conflict between God and the Devil is now being waged on earth in the form of a struggle between the State Religion and the Kingdom of God, Caesar or Christ. The end is at hand, but a yet worse crisis must first come before Satan is finally overthrown and Christ is King indeed. Meanwhile patience, loyalty, faith in coming victory must characterize the saints of God in the midst of their suffering and persecution.

B. *Revelation 12-15.*

These chapters provide a typical illustration of the author's description of the fight between the opposing forces of the Beast and the Lamb, opening in chapter 12 with an explanation of the cause of the conflict, and closing with a vision of the coming victory. Nearly every verse offers matter for investigation and exegesis ; we must be content with endeavouring

to gain an impression of the whole, and can only draw attention to a few of the more important or interesting points.

Ch. 12 which explains the conflict appears to be based upon an earlier pagan apocalypse which has reached John through Jewish channels. A Dragon waits to devour a child about to be born ; but the child is snatched up into heaven, and the Woman that bore the child flees into the wilderness. The dragon in pursuit of the child assaults heaven, but is defeated and cast down by Michael and his angels. Hence the victory is won at the centre, but on the circumference, that is on the earth, it is all the fiercer ; for the dragon in his rage after a vain pursuit into the desert after the woman vents its wrath by bitter attacks upon her seed.

It is clear that, whatever may have been their significance in the original pagan apocalypse or in the later Jewish adaptation, many of the details are not relevant for any Christian interpretation, and only the broad outline can be used. The Woman must represent the true Israel. The suggestion is that from the true Israel the Christ appeared,—and safely escaped the danger that threatened Him! The devil would gladly have devoured Him at the outset, and was prepared even to assault the citadel to secure Him: but Christ is in heaven with the Church triumphant, and the Church militant here on earth is the object of the devil's hatred. What then does he do?

Ch. 13. He summons the aid of two beasts (vv. 1 and 11) which appear to represent the Roman Empire with all its might, and the heathen Imperial Priesthood, with the compulsory worship of the Emperor. Some of the phrases and ideas in these verses may be familiar to us from Daniel 7, while others are again drawn from other apocalypses. The horns as usual signify kings or emperors. The head 'as though smitten unto death' in v. 3 refers to the Emperor Nero, regarding whom two beliefs were widely held ; some, doubting the reality of his death, thought that he would re-appear from the East at the head of Rome's deadliest enemies, the Parthians, and exact vengeance from an ungrateful city by the destruction of Rome: others accepted the myth, more than once referred to in this book of Nero redivivus, Nero come to life again, and advancing against Rome with all the powers of the underworld. There follows a description of the setting up of a truly totalitarian state to

which the majority of people succumbed, while those who remained faithful to the Lamb were either slain or carried into captivity. The author looks for no easy way of escape, but for victory through death.

In verse 11 appears the second beast, representing the pagan priesthood whose duty it was to see that all the inhabitants of the Empire paid due worship to Caesar,—one of the main methods by which the unity of the Empire was achieved. The 'signs' described in verses 13-15 are miracles which were popularly associated with the Anti-Christ, and of a kind that the priests deceitfully practised. The 'mark' of the beast made on the forehead of all alike was a pagan parallel of the 'seal' on the forehead of the faithful, indicating in the first place protection, resulting from ownership by the beast and submission to him by those who bore the mark. Verse 17 describes the nature of this particular persecution, which was that of social boycott by which the faithful were deprived even of the necessities of life. And verse 17 gives us the famous number of the beast—666—which enthusiasts have expounded according to their own particular national or religious point of view from that day to this, applying it confidently, among others, to the Pope and to Luther, to Napoleon and to Hitler. There is little doubt, however, that in this context in the book of Revelation the reference is to Nero(n) Caesar, the vrst systematic persecutor of the Christian Church, the letters of whose name and title in Hebrew figures add up to 666 (or to 616, a variant reading, if the second n in the name be dropped).

Ch. 14 is regarded by Dr. R. H. Charles as a vision foreshadowing the Final Judgement of Chapter 20, and to that extent anticipatory. It is natural to connect the 144,000 of verse 1 with the same number of the sealed in chapter 7; there they have just arrived victorious in heaven: here they are returning to Zion to accompany the Lamb. The voice which the seer hears comes not from the 144,000, but from heaven and is such that only the 144,000 can understand it, for it is the song of redemption. 'Virgins' is used in the masculine in verse 4, probably indicating the growing emphasis on the virtue of celibacy in the Church. Then in verses 6-11 follows the threefold proclamation by angels of the Fall of Rome, described as Babylon the great, and put into the past tense in the manner of Hebrew prophecy as though the event

had already taken place, so certain is it to happen since it is in the mind and purpose of God. There is a strange combination of two phrases in verse 8,—the wine of his wrath, and the wine of her fornication. The last part of the chapter is somewhat complicated in detail, due apparently to the fact that two parallel accounts have become mingled together, but there can be no doubt of the impression that is intended to be conveyed,—of God's judgement upon the world, and the terrible destruction of the nations.

Ch. 15 is probably intended to follow in thought chapter 13, and verse 2 is the sequel to the persecution by the beast,—through death to victory and the worship of God. But the end is not yet: and before the final Judgement and the reign of Christ the seer in the following chapters relates the series of lesser judgements that must first take place on earth.

We may be conscious at times of a less rarified atmosphere in this book than in some of the other books of the New Testament, especially where the Seer has allowed to remain a number of details, vivid but often horrible to contemplate, which he found in the apocalypses of which he made use. Yet it contained a message very needful for the times at which it was written, and a message that has brought consolation and hope to multitudes in later ages at periods of intense suffering and persecution. Days such as the present are bound to raise questions in the minds of many; why is so much evil and sorrow permitted in the world? Why do the good and the wicked fare alike? can God love? is God powerless? is there a God at all? So the mind struggles with the problems of the universe. But the questions are not new, and even modern conditions are not without parallel in earlier days. Though his world was smaller than ours the Seer knew a great deal about cold brutalities and atrocities and attempts at annihilation and extermination. There is no attempt here to gloss over the facts of life; nor is there any attempt to justify the ways of God to man. But there is a confident and triumphant confession of faith. Sin sometimes prevails; there is no certainty that the righteous or the saints of God will always have the victory on earth. Nevertheless the essential Victory is won: the Christ is the Lamb upon the throne: God has not forgotten or forsaken those that are His upon earth, but there must be patience, loyalty, faith until the time of His appearing. We are recalled to the

glorious majesty of God, and are reminded that as He has won the victory for us in Christ so it is He that must complete it for us. 'To him that overcometh' the promises still stand secure,—'to eat of the tree of life', 'not to be hurt of the second death', 'to be arrayed in white garments', 'to be given a new name', 'to sit down with Christ on His throne' (chh. 2-4); and we too can join in the song of the victorious:

'Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest.' (Rev. 15:3, 4).

and with the ten thousand times ten thousand ascribe honour to the Lamb—

'Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom and might, and honour, and glory, and blessing' (5:12). 'Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.' (7:12.)

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